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Identity and political consciousness : community involvement of Mexican/Chicano youth

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IDENTITY AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OF MEXICAN/CHICANO YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITY AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OF MEXICAN/CHICANO YOUTH

by Etsuko Maruyama

This thesis examines how community involvement among youths of Mexican origin relates to the development of their social responsibility and identity. Involvement in their ethnic community is focused on as a manifestation of their political consciousness. Oral interviews were conducted with a set of youths of Mexican origin asking about their identity, school experiences, and perspectives on their community. The interview results demonstrate that the educational experience is crucial for them in terms of their political consciousness. Being knowledgeable about Mexican American history is an important factor for their community involvement but not necessarily decisive to their incentive to get involved in the community. The involvement is grounded not so much on their degree of identification with the community as a feeling of concern and care for the people in their community.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Latino population in California is growing rapidly, and it is expected to be the largest ethnic minority group in California and also at the national level in the near future. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the data based on the 2000 census show that in California the population of "Hispanic or Latino (of anyrace)" reached over 10 million. They compose 32.4 % of the entire

California population. This is a very high percentage compared to the other minority groups. Those who are "Black or African American" are reported as 7.4 % of the California population and that for "Asian" is 12.3 %. Among the "Hispanic or Latino" population, those who reported themselves as "Mexican" make up 25.0 % of the residents in California.[1]

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder"; Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1); available from http://factfinder.census.gov/bf/_lang=en...DEC_2000_SF1_U_DP1_geo_id=04000US06.html; Internet; accessed 4 April 2002.

The majority of the Latino population are youth. The Census data of the year 2000 shows that the number of the Latino youth under the age of 18 has reached over 4 million in California. They comprise about 37 % of the statewide Hispanic/Latino population. If age groups from 18 to 24 are added, the number expands to almost 5.5 million.[2] This means that the number of Latino youth under the age of 24 is about 50 % of the entire Latino population.

When we turn focus on their presence in schools, the overwhelming number of the Latino students is noticeable. In the public schools of California, the enrollment of "Hispanic or Latino" students marked 44.2 % of the entire student enrollment in 2001 and 2002. This figure is beyond that of "White (not Hispanic)" students, which is 34.8 % of the entire enrollment.[3] This large number of Latino students is significant to suggest the demographic composition of the future Californian population.

Because of this increasing proportion of the Latino population, studies to understand the situation of Latino youth correctly are imperative, and

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[2] California State Census Data Center, "California Population by Gender, Age and Race" (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 of Population and Housing, Summary File 1); available from http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/age-sex-race.xls; Internet; accessed 6 July 2002.

[3] California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, "Statewide Enrollment in California Public Schools by Ethnic Group, 2001-02"; available from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/StateEnr.asp?cChoice=StEnrEth&cYear=2001-02&cLevel=State&Submit1=Sub; Internet; accessed 6 July 2002.

especially those focusing on Mexican American youth are crucial. This is primarily because Mexican Americans have a long history as an ethnic minority in California and also make up the numerical majority among the Latino population. We need to increase a correct recognition of the Mexican American youth.

I . Latino Youth in Social Science Studies

Much research has been done regarding Latino youth in general, but few studies have been conducted exclusively on the youth of Mexican origin. The majority of past studies of minority youth tend to concentrate on African American youth as a comparison to white counterparts.[4] Some scholars have written about Mexican American youth in the past decades. However, unfortunately, their works encompassed biased views toward the Mexican population and were prone to generate negative distorted images of the group.

Octavio Romano pointed out in his 1973 article that social science studies created an incorrect concept of culture by which Mexican Americans have been described "only as passive receptors and retainers of whatever has

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[4] Martin Sánchez Jankowski, *City Bound: Urban Life and Political Attitude among Chicano Youth*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Miranda Yates and James Youniss, "Community Service and Political Identity Development in Adolescence, " *Journal of Social Issues* 54-3, (1998): 495-512.

transpired before them."[5] He contended that a problem existed in the process of objectification of Mexican Americans. It was problematic in the way to conceptualize the "Mexican traditional culture."[6] Romano found a persistent pattern among past social scientists who provided a distorted view of the Mexican American population. They had described the problems of the Mexican American community as inherent in their culture. Romano was strongly against this cultural determinism.[7]

Romano referred to Celia S. Heller's book regarding her perspective when speaking of Mexican American youth. Heller, a sociologist, wrote a book titled *Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads* in 1968. Romano criticized Heller's concept of "the traditional culture of Mexican Americans."[8] According to Romano, Heller described in a distorted way some aspects of Mexican Americans. He argued that she found Mexican American families as a submissive entity having less stress on higher education, "lax habits," and "less ambition."[9] Her argument was that all these characteristics of Mexican Americans were attributed to their familial socialization process.

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[5] Octavio Ignacio Romano-V, "Social Science, Objectivity, and the Chicanos." In *Voices: Readings from El Grito, A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought 1967-1973*. (Berkeley: Quinto Sol Book, 1973), 39.
[6] Romano, 48-49.
[7] Romano, 48-50.
[8] Romano, 51.
[9] Romano, 52.

According to her description, Mexican Americans were resigned to their situation and did not know how to improve it.

Romano opposed Heller's perspective because she was blind to the history of resistance and struggles of Mexican Americans against discrimination. Instead, Heller argued that the problems of this community were persistent and inherent among its population.[10] Romano concluded that Heller ended up only reinforcing the negative stereotypes of Mexican Americans.

During recent decades, studies of Latino youth appeared from different disciplines, and the fields of research on them have broadened. They range from such topics as mental health, psychotherapy, and cultural psychology.[11] However, their perspectives are those of "investigators," and Latino youth are presented as clinical samples or patients where they are relegated to be passive research subjects. In those studies, Latino youth are distinguished from those of the mainstream, and their behaviors, familial socialization, and traditional values are highlighted as if representing them as "extraordinary." As a result, these characteristics tend to be ascribed to their cultural background as "traits" that Latinos have.[12] In addition, based on the demographic data, most studies

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[10] Romano, 51-52.
[11] Carola and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, *Transformations: Immigration, Family Life, and Achievement Motivation Among Latino Adolescents*, (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1995).
[12] Luis A. Vargas and Joan D. Koss-Chioino eds. *Working with Culture: Psychotherapeutic Interventions with Ethnic Minority Children and Adolescents*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992).

characterize the Latino population as young, less-educated, blue-collar, and low-income households. Juvenile delinquency is a topic often mentioned in the studies of the Latino community, and the gang behaviors of the youth are described as active among this community.[13] These descriptions are a common perception of the Latino youth in social science studies.

Studies on Mexican youth tend to focus on their delinquent behaviors most often represented by gang members. There are few systematic studies that provide us with a situation of Mexican youth other than with delinquent behaviors.[14] One portion of the population has been singled out and emphasized negatively, which produced a distorted representation of the entire people. Additional disciplines have appeared to deal with the condition of Latino youth, yet some of them still replicate the same kind of shortcomings that Romano pointed out.

II. Beyond the Partial Depiction

Studies of Latino youth could encompass a diverse range of people. The term "Latinos" is a too simplified word to reflect the actual diversity of the people within. It is easy to fail to recognize the diversity in the countries of origin, such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and many others from Central and

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[13] Tony Waters, *Crime and Immigrant Youth*, (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1999), 69, 126.
[14] Waters, 70.

South American nations. This national diversity means that they have different experiences according to the histories and the social and political situations of their home country. The relationship between their home country and the United Stated creates a range of differences in their backgrounds and experiences. For example, the U.S. foreign policy toward a particular country can affect their migration process.

These differences may be affected by the disparity of classes among the population. Latinos of lower class background will have different experiences than those from an upper socioeconomic background. The study focusing on the former will show a difference in how they are socialized and educated from the latter.

The level of acculturation would also differ because of the different time period of their entry into the United States. There is a big gap in the assimilation level between newly-arrived immigrants and long-term residents. The cultural difference between the Mexican-born youth and the U.S.-born Mexican Americans can be significant. If the person was raised in Mexico, factors such as familial socialization, economic situation, and the country's social structure would make a difference in the person's identity formation compared to those who grew up in the United States. We need to acknowledge diversity among Latinos. It should be kept in mind that the population is not a

homogeneous entity and simple over-generalizations from research results should be avoided.

It is important to increase a correct understanding of the Latino population in general, and a comprehension of Mexican origin youth is crucial in order to demonstrate the heterogeneity of the population. Their long historical background in the United States provides Mexican Americans with a distinct identity and consciousness. While Latino youth have been lumped together as a homogenous entity, the author focuses on the youth of Mexican origin and explore unexamined aspects of their political awareness. The question this study raises is how the combination of being knowledgeable of their community history and the experience of community involvement correlate to the identity formation and political consciousness among youth of Mexican descent. The author employs their own statements on their identity and their experiences of schooling and community involvement. The author attempts to illustrate their situation and thoughts as youth of Mexican descent in the 21st century.

III. Political Consciousness and Concern to Community

Studies of political knowledge and interest of young adolescents argue that African Americans and Hispanic Americans are less politically aware and

less interested in general.[15] Such a finding tends to be dominant, and it is because the majority of studies on political socialization are based on that of Anglo-Americans.

The concept of "being political" was partially discussed in past studies. Many of them focused on the subjects' political behaviors such as voting and knowledge of the governmental system, political parties, and U.S. democracy.[16] This kind of knowledge is obtained if the individual is socialized through mainstream institutions. To estimate the person's political interest based solely on this level of knowledge is not fair. Thus, relying on these findings and concluding that non-Anglos including the Mexican and Latino population are less politically-conscious is misleading. Many Mexican youth are politically concerned and have their own form for actualizing their political consciousness.

Political behaviors include not only the action of voting itself but also others, such as "discussing political issues" and "working to protect local communities."[17] These behaviors are found among youths of Mexican origin the author interviewed. The author will argue that some Mexican American

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[15] Sheldon Berman, *Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility*, (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997), 37.

[16] S. W. Moore, J. Lare, and K.A. Wagner, *The Child's Political Worlds: A Longitudinal Perspective*, (New York: Praeger, 1985); Olive Stevens, *Children Talking Politics: Political Learning in Childhood*, (Oxford: Martin Roberston, 1982).

[17] James Youniss and Miranda Yates, *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 28.

youths are politically concerned and are far from being "less political." This contention is grounded on the interview results the author had with those who demonstrated these persistent behaviors.

This study investigates the motivation of some Mexican American youths' involvement in the Mexican/Latino community. Interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with youths who are engaged in service work for the Mexican/Latino community. They include both the native-U.S. born youths and those who are from Mexico. These youths show a concern and compassion or a commitment toward the community, and they actualize these feelings by participating and assisting the people there. It is because they recognize the issues in the community that need to be improved and that they hope to contribute to the betterment of their community.

IV. Correlation among Community Involvement, Social Responsibility, and Identity Building

The author assumes that voluntary engagement by youth in the community is a manifestation of a desire to assist those who need help and also a desire to diminish injustice in society. A concept of social responsibility is a key to understanding the desire for community engagement. Social responsibility is a consciousness "on the nature of a person's relationship with

others and with the larger social and political world."[18] When an individual reflects on the outer world, this consciousness involves the "ethical considerations of justice and care"[19] to others. The consciousness is stimulated when the individual faces people who are suffering, struggling, and oppressed. The function of the consciousness is explained by "the justice voice" and "the care voice." The justice voice is a response to "claims of inequality and is often framed in terms of rules, principles, and obligations." The care voice centers on "suffering and... framed in terms of compassion and response to those in need."[20]

"Social identity" explains the motivation for community involvement. The concept of social identity is "one's relationships to other persons and to a social-historical context."[21] Some scholars argue that community service works to strengthen social identity. The experience gives adolescents "opportunities for reflection on society's political, moral, and historical dimensions."[22] This process of self-reflection is also a process of self-searching for adolescents.[23] By casting themselves in relations with the larger society, they contemplate the meaning of their existence, including reflecting on who they are and where they

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[18] Berman, 12.
[19] Berman, 13.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Youniss and Yates, 20.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Youniss and Yates, 22.

belong. The experience of community involvement serves to raise social identity, and through that process it works to confirm the identity of the participants.

V. Political Consciousness and Community Involvement

Political consciousness is one of the components of social responsibility.[24] People with social responsibility "are conscious of the ways one is influenced by and influences that social and political world."[25] Thus, if the person is concerned with the social surroundings, either immediate or global, it is inevitable for the person to become politically interested because politics is the process to use power to govern the social systems. Those who are socially responsible are politically-concerned at the same time.

In this study, political consciousness implies not a direct interest or participation in the actual politics, but rather a state of mind that is sensitive to the unbalanced resource distribution in society and recognizes the unfair treatments imposed upon some people in a community. The author attempts to assess the degree of political consciousness among Mexican American youth by their involvement in their ethnic community.

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[24] Berman, 14.
[25] Berman, 12-13.

VI. School: A Site of Socialization

In previous studies the arguments regarding Latino youth and education were accompanied by a negative connotation. They were described as one of the most undereducated groups in the United States and that they drop out early from higher educational institutions.[26] Some educational studies start from a perception that the Mexican American and other Latino students are "failures" of the educational system.[27] Although recognizing the deficiency of current educational environments for minority students, other studies present Latinos as a marginalized people who feel uncomfortable with and do not fit into the school atmosphere. The students are described as experiencing feelings of isolation, withdrawal, and alienation.[28] It is explained that these feelings are caused "because of their cultural or racial/ethnic differences."[29] Here, a conflict between the retention of their ethnic/cultural background and the school environment is focused as a negative outcome on the subjects.

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[26] Alberta M. Gloria and Sharon E. R. Kurpius, "The Validation of the Cultural Congruity Scale and the University Environment Scale with Chicano/a Students," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 18, (November 1996): 533; R. V. Padilla, Jesus Treviño, Kenny Gonzalez, and Jane Treviño, "Developing Local Models of Minority Student Success in College," *Journal of College Student Development* 38, (March/April 1997), 125.
[27] Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change*, (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979), 78; Padilla, Jesus Treviño, Gonzalez, and Jane Treviño, 125.
[28] Gloria and Kurpius, 534-536.
[29] Gloria and Kurpius, 536.

To Latino youth, the school environment has not always been favorable. Their experiences at schools are often negative because of the insufficient educational support. However, the author argues that schooling provides some Latino youths with an important experience in terms of their socialization.

One of this study's hypotheses is that the educational experience as a socialization process is crucial for nurturing social and political consciousness among youth. Berman states that "The school is a social system in itself with an explicit and implicit political structure. It is, in essence, a microsociety, providing young people with a specific set of social and political experiences."[30] The school is an institution where students undergo an internal transformation through interactions with peers, friends, and teachers. The school experience naturally promotes socialization among the students. They adopt not only practical knowledge of society but also a perspective of it through schools. Therefore, the school and the experiences they have inside the institution affect the students' development of social responsibility.[31] Schools are a potential site to enable some Latino students to expand their worldview and generate a new consciousness and perspective.

VII. Shared Community Memory

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[30] Berman, 103.
[31] Ibid.

Bedolla argues that people who are involved in community service work are expected to have a certain level of politicization and also have a sense of community empathy.[32] When people in a community experience segregation and any forms of oppression by the dominant social force, that experience affects the residents' "attitudes towards the political system and political participation."[33] That political attitude brings solidarity in a community in order to defend themselves from the external oppressive forces.[34] Some authors contend that a collective historical memory in a community raises a sense of group autonomy in order to cope with the issues surrounding their community environment.[35]

What Bedolla's statement suggests is that a collective history—a memory of a shared experience in a community— could shape a common identity among the people there. If a community has a shared historical memory, the people within come to hold a similar social and political consciousness. Especially when people in a community share a cultural and ethnic background, it is easy for them to develop a collective historical memory and consciousness. Their experiences are different according to geographical areas, but Mexican

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[32] Lisa García Bedolla, " Fluid Borders: Latino Identity, Community and Politics in Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999), 23-24.
[33] Bedolla, 52.
[34] David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1995), 29.
[35] Bedolla, 55-56, 65; Gutiérrez, 29.

American communities share a history of seeking equal educational opportunity. They have struggled with the inferior circumstances represented by segregation and endeavored to improve their educational condition. This shared memory and experience create a sense of unity among the people in the community. The author assumes that considering a shared history is crucial to understand the development of the social perspective of youth and their community involvement.

Thus, the second hypothesis is that being knowledgeable about their community history and experience encourages the Mexican American youth to work for the betterment of the community. Here, being knowledgeable includes a person's familiarity with historical experiences of a community, especially that have been neglected by mainstream society. This knowledge stimulates a compassion for their community and creates a collective consciousness as a group member who shares the historical experience or background.

In the following chapters, the author first focuses on some historical facts and articulate how Mexican American youth developed political activism and political consciousness. Further, the author addresses the history of how the Mexican American community coped with the educational inequality imposed by segregation and then illustrates how they struggled to improve their educational surroundings. Next, the author suggests the correlation between the

political activism of the Mexican American community and their identity construction referring to the Chicano movement in the 1960s. Lastly, the author discusses the results of the oral interviews. The historical context of Mexican American communities in the United States and their school experience are examined for the analysis of the interview data. Through the interview analysis, the author explores not only their experience but also their perspective on the social surroundings and the Mexican/Latino community they serve. The last chapter describes the details of the interview procedure and method as well as the content analysis of the interviews.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: EDUCATIONAL STRUGGLES IN MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

In this chapter, the author illustrates how Mexican American communities have sought educational opportunity and have resisted unequal educational practices. Some scholarly findings in the past reinforced a common perception that the Mexican American population did not value the significance of education.[1] However, the reality is different. The Mexican American community never accepted segregation and has a history of resistance against inferior educational circumstances.[2] History shows that Mexican American communities fought for the improvement of the educational conditions and resisted the bureaucratic oppression represented by school segregation. Educational efforts to obtain upward mobility have been a key element in the

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[1] Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas*, Mexican American Monograph, no.11 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), xvi; Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, and Henry Gutiérrez eds., *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), xii.

[2] *Latinos and Education*, xiii.

history of Mexican Americans. They have showed a special commitment to their educational progress. In the following part, the author focuses on the historical context of their struggles over segregation in order to show how crucial an impact education has had upon the Mexican American community.

I . Anglo Domination: The Beginning of Mexican Alienation

The Mexican presence in the Southwest prior to Anglo migration did not enable them to avoid the prejudice and contempt directed to the Mexican population after the Southwest, which was a part of the Mexican Republic, became the territory of the United States. After the Mexican American War ended in 1848, Mexican subjects north of the border suddenly were under the governance of the United States. Thus, began the alienation of the Mexican population from their land.

They became excluded from the center of the economic and political structures as a result of the power shift to Anglo Americans. As U.S. capitalism was introduced and a new economic system permeated society, the Mexican community became less conspicuous and less influential.[3] The Mexican population was reduced to 13 % of the entire California population in 1849, which shows that they were becoming outnumbered by Anglo immigration.[4] As

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[3] Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Raw, 1988), 117-118.

the traditional ranch and pastoral business decayed, the economic opportunity among the Mexican community became strictly limited.[5] Adding to this situation, Mexican rancheros struggled to pay increasing taxes imposed upon them, such as poll, property, county, and road taxes. They had to mortgage their land to make ends meet. Furthermore, natural disasters during the 1860s caused the decrease of cattle prices. By the 1870s, the financial situation of Mexican landowners turned worse, which resulted in most of them losing their land. As a consequence, they became wage earners by way of manual labor.[6]

II. Construction of Anglo Supremacy and Mexican Subordination

There were latent animosity and prejudice among Anglo Americans toward the Mexican population. In Texas, the Anglo distrust toward them was reinforced through the memory of the Mexican War. The anti-Mexican sentiment stayed alive in the form of folklore and a school curriculum that described Mexicans as the conquered enemy.[7] Often the antagonism resulted in actual violence. In Southern California, such cities as Los Angeles and Santa

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[4] Acuña, 111.
[5] Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in A Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 46-51.
[6] Acuña, 116-117, 127.
[7] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 223-224.

Barbara witnessed much physical violence between Mexicans and Anglo Americans, which took forms such as lynchings, vigilante activity, and murders.[8]

Negative stereotypes were nourished among Anglo Americans as they encountered the Mexican community. These stereotypes tended to produce the partial and distorted images of the Mexican inhabitants. Many Mexicans were unskilled manual laborers and constituted the working class. The appearance of congested and poor barrio conditions intensified some Anglos' prejudice that Mexicans were "dirty" and not sanitary.[9] These negative stereotypes, although not warranted, made the Anglos keep a solid social distance from the Mexican community.

There had been a consistent and fundamental notion among the Anglo settlers in the Southwest that Mexicans are an inferior people.[10] Even individuals in public authority, including teachers and scholars, helped to spread a distorted idea that Mexicans are backward people who need to learn the democratic virtue of the United States.[11] In California, a similar negative perception of Mexicans developed. Almaguer contends that the notion of manifest destiny influenced the Anglo settlers' view of the Mexican population.

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[8] Camarillo, 20-21, 107-108.
[9] Montejano, 227.
[10] Montejano, 180, 220.
[11] Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1990), 36-37.

The Mexican rancheros depended on the uncultivated land for their pastoral economy. This fact gave the Anglo settlers an impression that Mexicans were lazy people who did not utilize the rich land. For the new Anglo settlers, California was the undeveloped frontier. The Mexican residents there looked lazy and non-productive workers. The ranchero class seemed to be a luxurious people wasting their money.[12] They were also perceived as "caring little for the welfare of their children" and not being qualified to be good citizens.[13] These images contributed to produce a distorted idea that "Californio's cultural backwardness" represented these social traits in California.[14]

The racial slurs and the negative stereotypes were repeated and permeated among Anglo Americans. Through this process, a perception of Mexican inferiority was inscribed among the people. Those who asserted that there was a "Mexican problem" negatively distinguished Mexicans from Anglo Americans. For example, a school declined to accept Mexican children asserting that they had a hygiene problem.[15] It became one of the grounds for a

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[12] Thomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 51-52.
[13] Almaguer, 52.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Montejano, 228.

segregated school for Mexican students. Other reasons for segregation were the different patterns of attendance and their English skills.[16]

Actually, whether Mexicans were really lazy, not sanitary, and less intellectual than Anglos was not a crucial point. As San Miguel Jr. observes, school segregation was practiced based on the strong "desires of the general population" who did not want Mexican students at the school where the Anglo students attended. That desire was consistent "regardless of their [Mexican students'] social standing, economic status, language capability, or place of residence."[17] The denigrating description of the Mexican traits was of a "matter of race and class."[18] It was an expression of Anglos' class demarcation from Mexicans. Thus, Anglo Americans' persistent desire to distinguish themselves from Mexicans was based on preserving the notion of Mexican inferiority. By negatively characterizing Mexicans, they created a justification for segregating them. The virtual aim was to maintain Anglo superiority over Mexicans.

This belief in Mexican inferiority and the educational policy centered on economic benefits helped to sustain the inferior educational provision to the Mexican children. Gonzalez observes that the U.S. political economic system directed the public education to treat "Mexican-Americans differently from other

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[16] San Miguel Jr., 55.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Montejano, 228.

Americans."[19] The economic system was relying on Mexicans as a cheap labor force serving the capitalist profit. The established system became a ground to justify the segregated school for Mexican students. In agricultural areas, the school curriculum for Mexican students was in accordance with farm owners' convenience.[20] It was based on the work schedule in fields where the children were an important labor force.

Thus, the Mexican children were treated as "irregular" students at schools because of their absence from school due to their need to work in the fields. They were perceived primarily as a labor force and their educational opportunity was secondary. This attitude was reported in a publication by the federal government of the early 1940s. It mentioned the prevailing attitude among school officials in order to avoid the conflict between schooling the Mexican children or having them as "the supply of cheap farm labor."[21]

Through this recognition, Mexican descent students became relegated to a second-class education. This recognition was reflected by inferior facilities and lower teachers' salaries at segregated Mexican schools. Segregation targeting Mexican children resulted in preventing the Mexican American community "from changing its economic and political relationship to the

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[19] Gonzalez, 13.
[20] Gonzalez, 95.
[21] Gonzalez, 100.

dominant society."[22] It is a relationship where Anglo superiority and Mexican subordination was maintained via education. Anglo superiority was reinforced not only through physical demarcation represented by segregated schooling but also through "the ideas and values" that were provided by the institutional system. Students adopted a notion through segregated schooling that "the Mexican school was physically inferior" and that segregation meant "separation of superior from inferior"—that is, Mexican inferiority.[23] The Mexican American community started to take action by resisting the school system and seeking equal educational opportunity for Mexican Americans.

III. The Emergence of the Mexican American Citizen Organizations

During the late 1920s, a visible movement of Mexican American civil rights organizations emerged. It was a time when the increasing number of Mexican immigrants was drawing public attention. In Texas, a Mexican American middle-class appeared as they accumulated some property by economic development in the area. Many of them were small entrepreneurs serving the Mexican community. Their businesses ranged from restaurants, bakeries, shoestores, drugstores, tailors, and to gasoline stations.[24] Others were

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[22] Gonzalez, 21.
[23] Montejano, 230.
[24] Richard A. García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941*, (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), 254.

doctors, lawyers, and teachers.[25] When they had established a certain status as well as permanent residency, they came to recognize their "ambiguous" position in the United States.[26] This accelerated especially after World War I when many veterans from the Mexican American community returned from the war front. Since they were born in the United States, they grew up as American citizens. However, it seemed that the larger society did not necessarily recognize them as such when the returning Mexican Americans witnessed intensified stereotypes toward newly-arrived Mexicans.[27] Immigration from Mexico was expanding at a large scale during the 1920s. As the number increased, the antagonism toward Mexican immigrants became apparent. Mainstream society blamed these immigrants for increasing "social problems" such as crime, diseases, and illiteracy. This anti-Mexican sentiment did not distinguish recent Mexican immigrants from American citizens of Mexican origin.[28]

In 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was founded in Texas. The founding members included middle-class professionals

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[25] Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 27; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 240.
[26] Gutiérrez, 74.
[27] Gutiérrez, 75.
[28] Mario García, 26; San Miguel Jr., 67.

such as attorneys, business owners, a state legislator, and a professor.[29] While the members consisted of Mexican Americans and their Mexican cultural background was respected, the crucial aim of the organization was to raise loyalty to the United States among the members. This is understandable when we consider that the founding members of LULAC strongly hoped that they were recognized as American citizens with full-fledged civil rights. In order to realize the goal, they needed to "convince other Americans that they too were loyal, upstanding American citizens."[30]

A. Education as a Tactics for Social Mobility

LULAC made conspicuous efforts for educational advancement in Mexican American communities in Texas and other Southwestern states. Many members considered education important not only to hasten the integration of Mexican Americans but also accelerate their social mobility.[31] LULAC's primary emphasis was on the smooth integration of Mexican Americans, so they recognized education as an indispensable means to promote the adoption of U.S. norms and values among Mexican Americans. LULAC members believed that

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[29] Mario García, 29-30.
[30] Gutiérrez, 76.
[31] San Miguel, Jr., 73.

if their educational level was raised, it would enable them to eliminate the discriminatory treatment of Anglo Americans toward the Mexican population.[32]

This perspective is represented by the following statement from a LULAC publication. It says LULAC had been asserting that "the fundamental and basic problem of our race in Texas and the United States was *education*. Educate the children of Mexican extraction and we will *measure up to* the requirement of American standards (emphasis added)."[33] It was Mexican Americans who were expected to adjust to American norms, and education was considered a tool for this aim. In sum, education was recognized as a "weapon" for the empowerment of Mexican Americans and also as the best remedy to solve the issues surrounding the Mexican American community.[34]

B. LULAC Educational Reform

LULAC members believed that the low-quality of education imposed upon Mexican Americans hindered their progress. Only a small number of children were given a chance to enroll in schools compared with their Anglo counterparts. Even if they were in school, children of Mexican descent tended

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[32] Mario García, 34.
[33] San Miguel, Jr., 74.
[34] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 257; García, 53.

to be provided a shorter school year. Usually the children were directed to attend segregated schools. However, these schools tended not to be well funded and the teachers' instructions were poor compared to regular schools.[35] During the 1930s, many schools where Mexican children attended were overcrowded. LULAC investigated the school situation. It found that in spite of almost the same number of students they had, only eleven schools existed for Mexican Americans while those in Anglo communities were twenty-eight in San Antonio. Adding to this unbalanced school distribution, there was a problem in the classroom capacity. According to the law at that time, there should be no more than thirty-five students in a classroom. While each Anglo classroom had below thirty-five students, Mexican American schools accommodated forty-eight students in one room.[36] The inequality between Anglo and Mexican schools was evident in the sizes of playgrounds and the amount of funding, too.[37]

There was also an imbalance of subjects of the curriculum for Mexican students. This was due to the sentiment of the time that considered them as having "a language problem," so the primary emphasis was put on the improvement of their English skills. However, they were taught more speaking skill rather than that for reading and grammar. Most of the time academic

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[35] San Miguel, Jr., 23-24; Montejano, 192.
[36] San Miguel, Jr., 83.
[37] Ibid.

subject matters were dismissed, and Mexican students were taught such subjects as sewing, cooking, art work, and auto repair.[38] Being treated as "foreigners," Mexican students were assigned classes of "hygiene and desirable social habits."[39]

LULAC members perceived that "limited education in inferior Mexican schools throughout the Southwest" maintained a bad cycle of relegating their people to the undereducated and unskilled labor force.[40] Being determined to change the situation, LULAC dedicated itself to educational improvement among Mexican American communities. It challenged school segregation by filing law suits in order to win court cases against the segregation of Mexican American school children.

The perspective of LULAC was that enforcing segregated education upon students of Mexican households denied them their equal educational opportunity.[41] The majority of the students were American citizens, born and raised in the United States. In 1931, LULAC made its first attempt to remove segregated education at Independent School District in Del Rio, South Texas. This case, *Independent School District V. Salvatierra*, marked the first legal action to question constitutionality of the educational segregation by the local

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[38] Gonzalez, 89.
[39] San Miguel, Jr., 39-40.
[40] Mario García, 53.
[41] San Miguel, Jr., 75.

public school.[42] Mexican American parents in the district demanded education for their children with the same facilities and instruction as white counterparts.

The court judgement found that "it was unconstitutional to segregate Mexican students based on national origin grounds." However, the court admitted the need of segregated education based on practical educational reasons.[43] The court judged that children attending segregated Mexican schools needed to have a special instruction. The superintendent testified that "a great percentage" of these children had late enrollment and irregular attendance because they were engaged in agricultural work. Adding to this different attendance pattern, he contended that these students did not have sufficient English skills compared with Anglo students. All these factors became grounds to allow segregated education for students of Mexican descent.[44]

C. Lemon Grove Incident

It was coincidentally the same year when another Mexican American community in San Diego, California, filed a lawsuit questioning the local school's segregation policy. The Mexican community became united and

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[42] San Miguel Jr., 78.
[43] San Miguel Jr. 80.
[44] Ibid.; Camarillo describes that children in the Mexican American household were important hands to help out their family with the agricultural labor at Santa Barbara during the early twentieth century. See Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in A Changing Society*, 166-168.

succeeded in restoring the former educational program at the integrated school for the Mexican descent children.

San Diego witnessed a rapid population growth during the first decade of the twentieth century. The number multiplied during the decade and reached 40,000 by 1910. Camarillo states that in the city of San Diego 3,000 to 4,000 Mexicans resided according to a report in 1914. The increase of Mexican migration accelerated until the 1920s.[45] As a result of the growing capitalist economy, Mexicans were engaged in many fields of industry, especially construction, transportation, and agricultural work. Their community consisted of many unskilled and semiskilled manual laborers.[46]

The Lemon Grove Grammar School had a hundred and sixty-nine students. Seventy-five students were from Mexican households. Both Mexican and Anglo students were attending the same school. However, one morning in January, 1931, the principal instructed the Mexican descent children to move to the separate school building prepared especially for the Mexican students.[47] Suddenly, these students were no longer allowed to attend the once integrated school.

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[45] Camarillo, 208-209.
[46] Camarillo, 213.
[47] Robert R. Alvarez, Jr., "The Lemon Grove Incident: The Nations First Successful Desegregation Court Case," (date unknown), 3.

Contrary to the school officials' expectation, the Mexican students did not obey the principal's instruction. They did not go to the segregated school. Being "dejected, embarrassed, and angry," the students went home and reported the incident to their families.[48] Their response was quick and firm. The parents organized their neighborhood in order to deal with this problem. After consulting with a Mexican consul and an attorney, they filed a lawsuit against the Lemon Grove School Board.[49]

The debate at the court focused on whether the segregation was aimed to assist the development of students who were academically behind or was merely an attempt to segregate the students based on their ethnic background. The school board asserted that they needed segregation in terms of educational instruction and for the advantage of the Mexican students. However, the court decision was against the school board's claim. It concluded that there was no legal ground in California to allow segregated education based on the students' descent or nationality. The court decision demanded that the Mexican students return to the regular school they attend with Anglo students.

D. Méndez et al. v. Westminster Board of Education

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Alvarez, Jr., 8-9.

The significant court decision to terminate school segregation of Mexican students in California was made in 1945. It was the *Méndez v. Westminster* case. This case was a landmark for several reasons in terms of the history of educational segregation in California.

Gonzalo Méndez was a farm owner in Santa Ana, Orange County. He and his wife sent their three children to the elementary school in Westminster. The school denied them admission contending that they did not have sufficient English fluency. However, their cousins, who were also Mexicans, attended the same school. This was due to their light skin color and their last name being misunderstood as French by the school administrators.

The Méndez family took action to counter this unfair treatment of their children. They organized parents in their neighborhood and sent a petition to the school board to request the termination of segregation against Mexican students. The board responded with a compromise to allow the Méndez's children to enroll in the school exceptionally. The Méndez did not accept this suggestion. Instead, they sought to realize the desegregation of Mexican students through a legal appeal to the federal district court.[50]

In 1945, Méndez and other parents filed a lawsuit against the Westminster and other local school districts in Orange County.[51] Two years

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[50] Gonzalez, 150-151.
[51] Gonzalez, 147, 151.

after, the plaintiff won a court decision made by the U.S. Circuit Court that declared school districts could not segregate students based on their national origin.[52] Also, the decision was significant in admitting that school segregation violated students' rights in terms of the provisions granted by the Fourteenth Amendment.[53] Seven years before Brown v. Board of Education, this case became a historical landmark to terminate school segregation in California based on the students' national origin.

IV. Community Mobilization

As stated above, Mexican American communities have been challenging the practice of segregation at schools. These achievements were realized through unity among the residents in the community. Next, the history of community mobilization among Mexican American communities is reviewed.

A. LULAC Grass-Roots Activism

LULAC members succeeded in mobilizing the Mexican American community through their campaign for educational improvement in the 1930s. After the *Salvatierra* case, LULAC changed its strategy of educational reform

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[52] Christopher Arrola, "A Landmark Little Noted," from *A Family Changes History: Méndez v. Westminster 1947-1997*, (paper prepared for the Harvard Review Forum co-sponsored by UCI, 25 April 1998), 15.
[53] Gonzalez, 152.

and put less emphasis on lawsuits than before. They were disappointed with the court decision of the *Salvatierra* case. They found that the lawsuit strategy was not enough to eliminate discriminatory practice against Mexican Americans. They came to rely on the grass-roots efforts to mobilize the community as a practical way to change the situation.[54] For example, LULAC developed a connection with parents. They asked parents their cooperation to work for the improvement of their children's school environment. To encourage parents' involvement in Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was one of the focused tasks of LULAC members.[55]

The other strategy LULAC utilized was to gain the broader public support and to reach out to the non-Mexican population. Eleuterio Escobar's activism in educational reform involved not only the local community at the grass-roots level but also broad public figures. Escobar had been serving as a LULAC's educational committee leader in San Antonio. The committee conducted an investigation on local school conditions. It was obvious that Mexican household students were assigned to poor school facilities and educational environments. The committee found that an unequal budget allocation was a cause of the situation and demanded that the school board improve the Mexican schools. However, the board's reaction was slow and

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[54] San Miguel, Jr., 80-81.
[55] San Miguel, Jr. 82.

negative to their claim. Seeing this attitude, the committee, led by Escobar, appealed to the public for their support and aimed to pressure the local political authorities.[56]

Escobar took the lead in contacting people from various fields and organizations and succeeded in gaining support from them. The supporters were not limited to the Mexican American community but also ranged from civic organizations to labor unions and religious groups.[57] He also obtained support from influential public officials such as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the mayor to back up their educational reform.[58]

Even after he resigned his position with LULAC, Escobar's active involvement in the community continued. The new educational committee led by Escobar was called La Liga Pro-Defensa Escolar (the School Improvement League). La Liga was successful in mobilizing Anglo state legislators in order to achieve their goal of school reform.[59] La Liga put pressure on the San Antonio School Board by proposing a bill with legislators to reduce the length of their term. The aim was to make apparent the educational needs of the Mexican American community to them. Escobar organized the community in sending telegrams to a Senator for the introduction of the bill. The number of telegrams

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[56] Mario García, 66-69.
[57] Mario García, 69-70.
[58] Mario García, 70-71.
[59] Mario García, 72.

reached more than two hundred. With this broad support from the community and state legislators, La Liga members succeeded in gaining statements from the School Board President that he would promise to improve Mexican schools by having new buildings and facilities and hiring more teachers. Escobar and other members found that their goals were achieved and withdrew the effort to introduce the bill.[60] La Liga also mobilized the community by hosting a mass rally, a large fiesta program, and athletic field days. Their community mobilization effort revealed their potential influence in changing the social conditions surrounding the Mexican American community.[61]

C. Community United: Sleepy Lagoon Incident

The Sleepy Lagoon Case had a significant impact upon the Mexican American community. It was the first time when the press portrayal of Mexican American youth was widely exposed to the public, and its negative and sensational description of the Mexican American youth attracted public attention.[62] They were described as dangerous young gang members who were involved in crimes such as fighting and murder. The Mexican American

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Mario García, 70-73.
[62] Mauricio Mazon, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*, Mexican American Monograph, no. 8 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 20.

community perceived this incident as a manifestation of the overt racism against them.

The beginning of the incident was when a Mexican American teenager, José Díaz, was found dead in a Los Angeles barrio in August 1942. Many Mexican American youth were arrested based on the fact that they belonged to a group that the police suspected was of a gang affiliation.[63] But the prosecution procedure was problematic and involved many irregularities.

The testimonies presented in court were biased and antagonistic to Mexican Americans. The testimony offered by Lieutenant Ayres was obviously prejudiced against the defendants. His emphasis was that the gang crimes were caused by their inherent nature deriving from their biological background. His testimony focused on their "Indian" origin that was assumed to be of a violent and cruel nature and that made Mexican Americans commit murder.[64] He went further to talk about "a wild cat and domestic cat" and went on referring to the difference in cat species. He stated that even cats are different according to the species, implying that so are human races between Mexicans and Americans.[65]

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[63] Sánchez, 266.
[64] Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo De León, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 88; Sánchez, 266; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 325.
[65] Mazon, 21-22.

During the trial, both the judge and the District Attorney did not allow the defendants to cut their hair and change their zoot-suit clothes when attending court. This seemed to imply that the judge wanted to keep the defendants' "bad impression" in court in order to represent them as delinquent gang members.[66] The local mass media fostered sensational campaigns, which raised increased fear and antagonism among Anglo residents toward Mexican Americans. The outcome was that seventeen Mexican American youth defendants were convicted of charges from assault to first-degree murder.[67]

Following the conviction, the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was formed. The members included a wide variety of people. The chair was Carey McWilliams, who was chief of the California Division of Immigration and Housing as well as a journalist and a lawyer. Other members were political activists, Chicano laborer organizers, and those who were engaged in the Hollywood entertainment business.[68] A few years later, they succeeded in gaining a court decision admitting that the judge in charge of the Sleepy Lagoon Case was biased and he failed to respect the rights of the defendants during the trial. It acknowledged the innocence of the young Mexican American defendants.[69]

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[66] *Occupied America*, 325; Sánchez, 266.
[67] Sánchez, 266.
[68] *Occupied America*, 256; Sánchez, 242, 246-247, 249, 261.
[69] *Occupied America*, 256.

B. Mexican American Movement (MAM)

The Sleepy Lagoon incident marked a striking memory among the Mexican American community. It also made MAM members reconsider the root of the issue. They came to perceive the incident with a critical perspective and recognize that the case involved not only prejudice but also discrimination and social inequality.[70]

MAM was the first student-oriented organization of Mexican Americans.[71] When it initially appeared, most of the participants were high school students. In 1942, the Mexican American Movement (MAM) was born after incorporating members from a YMCA affiliated group.[72] It was an outcome of politicization among a group of young Mexican Americans in Los Angeles who were seeking higher education. In the 1940s, these young members became college students, which led their way to the middle-class with professional jobs such as social workers and teachers.[73]

The philosophical characteristic of MAM was its emphasis on education. The members identified education with success in society. The members were promising youth who expected to achieve success through higher education.[74]

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[70] Muñoz Jr., 37.
[71] Sanchez, 255.
[72] Carlos Muñoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, (New York: Verso, 1989), 36.
[73] Sánchez, 255.
[74] Sánchez, 257.

The words by one youth, in its newsletter *The Mexican Voice*, described this belief that "Education is the only tool which will raise our influence, command the respect of the rich class, and enable us to mingle in their social, political, and religious life."[75]

Adding to practical benefits, they believed that education would enable them "to understand the world" by expanding their view toward society beyond the barrio.[76] This is an interesting implication that MAM members in the 1940s recognized the potential power of education to transform their people in terms of their world perception. A prominent Mexican American educational scholar, George I. Sánchez, observed that "we were not given schools, so we remained ignorant of the new way of life that had been ruthlessly thrust upon us."[77] This is a statement of a belief that without proper schooling, Mexican Americans would remain less knowledgeable and defenseless against oppressive social forces.

MAM members took an initiative in solving the problems surrounding their community. They were concerned with such issues as poor educational conditions and juvenile delinquency as well as antagonism and discrimination

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[75] Muñoz, Jr., 31.
[76] Sánchez, 257.
[77] Mario García, 255.

against the Mexican population.[78] The members made efforts for the advancement of Mexican Americans, encouraging youth to seek better educational and social environments. They believed that education would not only reduce the discriminatory treatment toward Mexican Americans but also contribute to the socioeconomic advancement of their people "as a group."

V. Shared Memory and Identity Formation

Historically, the public education and the issues related to the educational practice have affected the course of Mexican American communities. The residents within the community went through a collective experience of struggles revolving around educational issues, which inscribed among them a common memory. Education has become a vehicle for them not only to realize their social mobility but also to build a bond inside the Mexican American community.

This experience enabled Mexican Americans to define their identity and consciousness. Sánchez refers to an emerging "new cultural identity" of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles during the early twentieth century. He observes that this identity "was forged within the context of a hostile, racist environment which sought to deny Mexican Americans a claim to being

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[78] Gutiérrez, 136-137; Muñoz Jr., 35; Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo De León, 93.

'Americans.'"[79] This distinctive consciousness of being a Mexican American is fortified through the experience of alienation and marginalization by the dominant social group.

David Gutiérrez writes that "discrimination... may serve as a catalyst, encouraging members of minority populations to overcome lines of internal stratification that divided them in the past."[80] Both Sánchez and Gutiérrez suggest that the experience of oppression could help to create a shared consciousness among the people in the community. People in the community must have felt the intensified antagonism and negative stereotypes against Mexican Americans through experiences of segregation and educational inequality.

Griswold del Castillo observes that the Spanish language press of the nineteenth century in Los Angeles contributed to "increase Mexican-Americans' solidarity by reporting common experience of persecution and discrimination."[81] The press criticized Anglo Americans' discriminatory attitude toward Mexicans. Not only did it call for a community solidarity and action, but also the press raised "ethnic awareness" by articulating their "group victimization."[82]

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[79] Sánchez, 13.
[80] Gutiérrez, 29.
[81] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890: A Social History*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 127.
[82] Griswold del Castillo, 131.

Acuña addresses the importance of "community consciousness" and "a sense of their history as a community" among Mexican Americans. Without them, he argues, people become deprived of a voice to resist against the oppressive force of a dominant group. He illustrates how Los Angeles city authorities attempted to uproot the Mexican American community by using the city's redevelopment power. The redevelopment plan was harmful for Mexican Americans because it would not only eliminate the community's physical presence but also a "sense of their place in history."[83]

The Mexican American community has been facing a challenge of educational inequality. Through the experience, they nourished an ethnic awareness that is a collective consciousness as group members who share a history in the community. Educational issues represented by school segregation played a pivotal role in the history and identity construction among Mexican Americans. Their engagement in those issues has made a psychological and intellectual impact on them. The important fact is that no other ethnic minorities had suffered from such a broad level of educational segregation based on the alleged language deficiency and also that practice was maintained by a state or a region. Especially in the Southwestern states, Mexican Americans experienced severe educational segregation that derived from discrimination

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[83] Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Anything But Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*, (New York: Verso, 1996), 20.

against Spanish-speaking students from the late nineteenth century up to the 1960s.[84] This history of educational adversity became a channel for them to forge a sense of community. It is a consciousness that they are the members of a community who share the same ordeal. That consciousness enables them to create solidarity as well as bringing them a political consciousness about social inequality.

In the following chapter, a focus is shifted on the correlation between the political consciousness and political activism among the Mexican American youth. The author illustrates a history of Mexican American community activism. Further, the author argues that their activism had an aspect of identity confirmation, based on an assumption that the youths attempted to define their ambiguous identity and position in the American society.

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[84] San Miguel Jr.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND MEXICAN AMERICAN YOUTH: FORMATION OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY

In this chapter the author surveys the history of Mexican American youth activism. Mexican American youth have a historical background of political activism that has been documented. Chicano activism has witnessed youth who are dedicated to organizing the Mexican American community while maintaining a strong and positive ethnic pride. The author will explore the process of identity construction in Mexican American youth activism.

As we have seen, Mexican Americans have been demonstrating community-mobilizing activism, which has served to mold their identity. This group identity has been formed through confrontation with adverse social circumstances and treatment. Márquez states that "identity construction is an important part of minority politics."[1] He further states that "ethnic and racial

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[1] Benjamin Márquez, "Choosing issues, choosing sides: constructing identities in Mexican-American social movement organizations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24-2, (2001): 219.

identities emerge from distinct visions of community life and politics."[2] These statements suggest that experiences in a certain community sphere help to form a particular collective perspective and consciousness.

Engagement in political activism among Mexican Americans is a process of defining themselves by situating the Mexican American community in a social context. Their activism aims to reveal social issues that are negatively affecting the people in a community, and it attempts to solve them by pointing out the cause of the issues. Through this process, the group engaged in the activism perceives their position in society. This process makes them recognize their social relationship with the dominant group in society. Thus, political activism leads to social identity for the group members. It also means to define who they are and where they belong, that is, their identity.[3]

I . The Mexican American Generation and Search for Identity

During the early decades of the twentieth century, what historians call "The Mexican American Generation" appeared. People in this generation experienced a struggle to define their identity because of their ambiguous position deriving from their upbringing influenced by two cultures.[4]

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[2] Márquez, 220.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 255.

They shared a similar background shaped by historical events around the 1930s. Most of their parents were Mexican immigrants and their children, the so called "Mexican-American Generation", were the first generation born and raised in the United States. By the 1930s these U.S.-born youth of Mexican parentage exceeded the number of the Mexicans who were not U.S. citizens.[5]

They were socialized and educated through U.S. institutions. Spanish usage declined among this generation, and English became more dominant as their primary language. As they became more acculturated to American society, they developed their own values and ideals that were different from those of the earlier generation who were more Mexican-oriented.[6] Growing up in the United States, they marked a clear distinction from their parents' generation not only in terms of acculturation but also their consciousness and worldview.

The Mexican American Generation was never spared from the discrimination by Anglo American society based on their Mexican ancestry. However, the young generation adopted the value of American democracy and held a belief in it. They showed "greater willingness to participate in American political institutions"[7] and believed that the system would provide them with equal opportunity as American citizens. This perception made them pursue success

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[5] Mario García, *Mexican Americans*, 15.
[6] Richard A. García, "The Mexican American Mind: A Product of the 1930s." In *History, Culture and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s*. (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Bilingual Press, 1983), 68-74.
[7] Sánchez, 229.

through individual efforts.[8] They hoped that prejudice and discrimination would be overcome when the socioeconomic condition of the Mexican American community was improved and people achieved a successful life. This generation believed that discrimination against the Mexican population would disappear once they established high economic and social status and obtained recognition from the social mainstream. Their assumption was that someday their ethnic origin would not matter if they remained loyal to the American democratic values and systems.[9]

However, at the same time, the new generation had to admit that their rights and opportunities as fully American citizens were limited. The Great Depression brought the Americans severe economic conditions. An insecure social atmosphere prevailed. Job discrimination against the Mexican population became harsh as the unemployment rate skyrocketed. Nativism and anti-foreigner sentiment became powerful, and a broad-level repatriation movement targeting the Mexican population was carried out.[10] One study contends that 500,000 to 600,000 Mexicans including their U.S.-born children departed between 1929 and 1939.[11] Other forms of discrimination, such as in public facilities and schools, seemed intensified.[12] The Mexicans were subject to restriction in using swimming pools and dance halls.

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[8] Mario García, 35.
[9] Mario García, 33-34; Sánchez, 259-260.
[10] *Occupied America*, 202-204, 221.
[11] *Occupied American*, 202.
[12] Sánchez, 259, 264.

School facilities and programs were not attuned to accommodate the increasing number of Mexican students.

These social circumstances seemed to imply that mainstream society was not willing to accept the Mexican American population. A feeling of frustration increased among the young Mexican American Generation.[13] This frustration of the youth in Los Angeles climaxed in disillusionment and distrust of mainstream society when they witnessed the Zoot Suit Riots. The incident manifested a vicious mockery and violence against the Mexican American youth in the city. In the early 1940s they were emerging and creating a subculture by their unique attire called a "zoot suit."[14] The youth were molding their identity by incorporating a unique characteristic of the youth subculture to emphasize their American aspect.

The expression of the Mexican American youth subculture became a target of criticism and antagonism. The media played a role to raise public fear that the Mexican American youth were disturbing social stability by engaging in delinquent behaviors and alleged crimes. They were described as a source of a social disorder.[15]

One night in June 1943, a mob, most of them U.S. Navy servicemen, rushed into movie theaters and bars in Los Angeles. When these servicemen found the Mexican American youths, they assaulted them. Many of the youths were beaten

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[13] Sánchez, 260
[14] Sánchez, 265.
[15] Sánchez, 267; David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 125.

badly and taken out of their clothes. They suffered harsh violence, and some of them were left bleeding and unconscious on the street.[16] The Los Angeles police were not willing to settle the situation, and most of the violence and assaults by the servicemen were ignored. Adding to this, more than six hundred Mexican American youths were arrested without valid verifications of a crime.[17]

The Mexican American Generation perceived that this mob violence manifested a deep-rooted hostility and discrimination against the Mexican population. It was revealed that their status as U.S. citizens did not guarantee that their civil rights would be respected. They recognized that the mainstream society, including the servicemen, the media, and the police, were not favorable and generous to Mexican Americans.[18] Rather, this incident reflected their strong antagonism toward the minority youth. Mainstream society did not ask if they were American citizens or not, but rather, only their ethnic and cultural background counted.

The Mexican American Generation sought who they were and where they belonged. Their identity dilemma was that they grew up as American citizens, but they were not treated equally. They made efforts to break through this dilemma. What the Mexican American Generation attempted was to define themselves by asserting that they were full-fledged American citizens, which was represented by

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[16] *Occupied America*, 257.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Sánchez, 267.

the philosophy of LULAC. By strengthening loyalty to and adopting U.S. democratic values, the young Mexican American generation attempted to define its identity.

A few decades later, a new generation came to adopt a radically different perspective from the Mexican American Generation regarding identity and a sense of their place in society. During the Chicano movement, some Mexican American youths attempted to define their identity by developing a distinctive perspective to explain the social relationship between mainstream society and Mexican Americans.

II. Chicano Movement: A New Philosophy of Identity

Contrary to the expectations of the former generation, during the 1950s and 1960s Mexican Americans were still excluded from the promise of equal opportunity embedded in American democracy. Their socioeconomic condition was improving little by little compared to decades before, and some Mexican Americans obtained economic mobility and access to college education. However, still a conspicuous number of Mexican households were under the poverty line. Their average amount of education was stagnated and far below that of Anglo counterparts.[19] Such issues

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[19] Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997),22.

as rampant discrimination, poverty, and poor educational conditions persistently bothered leaders in Mexican American communities.[20]

Feelings of disappointment and disenchantment with the American system expanded among Mexican American communities. They became skeptical of "the 'goodness' of American society."[21] They questioned the legitimacy of the system in U.S. democratic society, which promises equal opportunity.

Many factors could account for their feelings of dissatisfaction. Operation Wetback of 1954 marked the mass removal of the Mexican population who had illegal status. Over one million Mexicans were deported.[22] This mass population seizure involved unlawful actions by the Immigration and Naturalization Service toward Mexican Americans, such as home intrusion and detention, which was violating their citizenship rights. The operation symbolized a repeated scapegoating of Mexican Americans following the systematized mass deportation during the Great Depression years in the 1930s. The Mexican American community seemed subject to the power of the federal authorities such as the INS and the Border Patrol as "illegal" immigrants received public attention as a social problem.[23]

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[20] Ignacio M. García, 27-28; Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in California: A History of Mexican Americans in California*, (San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser Publishing Company, 1984), 83.
[21] Ignacio M. García, 13.
[22] Griswold del Castillo and De León, 106.
[23] Camarillo, *Chicanos in California*, 83; David G. Gutiérrez, 153, 177.

Their involvement in the political arena led them to face another disappointment. During the early 1960s, many Mexican American veterans and the state legislators cooperated in the Democratic Party for the presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy. In spite of their fervent support, they could not get satisfactory rewards after the election, even though Kennedy gained overwhelming support from the Mexican American community.[24] There was a rising awareness stimulated by the African American civil rights movement. Mexican American communities also wanted to have their voice heard. Some Anglo liberals and politicians became conscious of the plight of African Americans, but they seemed unconcerned with that of Mexican Americans.[25] This fact increased some leaders' frustration concerning the progress of the Mexican American community.

The Mexican American community and its leaders realized their position in American society had not fundamentally changed for decades. The young Mexican Americans coming of age around the 1960s were achieving higher educational and occupational levels than their parents' generation. However, they felt their marginalized position in mainstream society was subject to the second-class treatment in education and politics.[26] In order to overcome this dead end, some Mexican American activists decided to protest against the social disadvantages surrounding their community. They did not hesitate to express their discontent

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[24] Ignacio M. García, 23.
[25] Ignacio M. García, 29-30.
[26] David G. Gutiérrez, 183-184.

with Anglo society. With a militant manner, some activists manifested their attitude by a perspective and philosophical framework of "chicanismo."[27]

The new generation marked a clear difference from the former one in terms of their worldview. While their precursors focused on the integration of Mexican Americans into the social mainstream, they were no longer satisfied with the old tactics "emphasizing inclusion and telling 'their' side of American history" employed by the former generation.[28] The young generation started initiating a movement to address their discontent, articulating the inferior surroundings and status that Mexican Americans were facing.

Two major points explain the theoretical phases of the Chicano movement. One was its persistent desire to define their identity. Carlos Muñoz Jr. states that the Chicano movement needs to be understood as a politics of identity.[29] This means the movement was initiated as "a quest for identity and political power."[30] David Gutiérrez observes that the word Chicano had served "as an act of defiance and self-assertion and as an attempt to redefine themselves by criteria of their own choosing."[31] Gómez-Quiñones states that when a group is "under conditions of colonial status, sovereignty, and forced annexation," an assertion of identity

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[27] Ignacio M. García, 8.
[28] Ignacio M. García, 43.
[29] Muñoz, Jr., 8.
[30] Muñoz, Jr., 15.
[31] David G. Gutiérrez, 184.

becomes crucial and a "politically charged matter."[32] The Chicano movement originating in the 1960s aimed to increase the power of Chicanos. The leaders believed that Chicano power was realized by defining and intensifying their identity through political involvement.[33]

Another aspect of the Chicano movement is its theoretical derivation from antagonism against the larger society. Chicano activists perceived that the Mexican American community faced obstacles that were socially structured by their ethnic background. Navarro states that the Chicano movement is explained as an accumulation of multiple antagonisms. The antagonism was based on the recognition that in history Mexican Americans had been deprived of their autonomy and their voice.[34]

A Chicano perception is that the cause of the disadvantages in their community is not from within, but it is socially and historically structured by external forces.[35] The larger society is controlled by Anglo Americans who have fundamentally excluded Mexican Americans based on their racial and ethnic background. As a result of Anglo dominance in the social structure and power, Mexican Americans were uprooted from their legitimate place. The Anglo

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[32] Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 6.
[33] Muñoz, Jr., 10.
[34] Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in* Texas, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 1, 7.
[35] Ignacio M. García, 43.

dominance was harmful to the Mexican American community especially because it did not allow them to have an appropriate identity construction.[36] The social authorities had been implanting distorted images of Mexican Americans through their policies with discriminatory treatment and descriptions. Not only did these negative stereotypes permeate society, but they were internalized among Mexican Americans themselves and prevented them from developing a positive identity and self-esteem.[37]

Muñoz suggests that a process of assimilation is a key to the formulation of Mexican American identity. According to the Chicano perspective, assimilation enabled some Mexican Americans to obtain social mobility, but at the cost of weakening their identity through socialization from U.S. institutions. The Chicano movement was initiated to seek a new identity, aiming to replace the "lost" identity through the assimilation process. Thus, Chicano identity was born by refusal of assimilation into U.S. capitalist norms and social systems.[38]

What is characteristic of the Chicano perspective is its dichotomy distinguishing Chicanos from Anglo Americans. This dichotomy intended to draw a clear-cut line between the Chicano and the Anglo worlds. By doing so, they attempted to establish their own belief system that would "release" Chicanos from

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[36] Ignacio M. García, 133-136.
[37] Ignacio M. García, 43-44.
[38] Muñoz, Jr., 47-80.

the Anglo-oriented values that permeated the larger society. This would protect Chicanos from the external "relentless attack on their identity."[39]

What Chicano activists experienced was to become very sensitive to and conscious of the surrounding world.[40] To recognize their surroundings was to demarcate themselves in society. Chicano philosophy attempted to establish a perceptual border between Chicanos and the larger society. Their sharpened sense of perception made them reflect on the issues confronting their community such as rooted discrimination, poverty, and limited social mobility. To articulate these problems was a process of defining their place in society by charging the mainstream with the cause. Through this process, Chicano activists sought persistently the locus of their identity. The Chicano movement was "a relentless desire for a rightful place for Chicanos in society."[41]

The history of Chicano political activism suggests a strong linkage with their identity development. It is because the Chicano movement emphasized having pride in being Mexican American. Identity became a crucial factor for Chicanos in their politically-motivated movement against the discriminatory treatments imposed upon their community.

Ignacio García contends that through this movement a strong sense of

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[39] Ignacio M. García, 44.
[40] Ignacio M. García, 5.
[41] Ignacio M. García, 53.

commitment to the community emerged among Chicano activists. He states that the ideology of *Chicanismo* summoned "the preoccupation with participation in community affairs, the securing of democratic rights and justice for the community, a commitment to developing parallel institutions and to opening existing ones to Mexican Americans."[42] The author assumes that their unique perspective of Chicanismo significantly contributed to the formation of community concern among the activists. When they reflected on their people's struggle and the discriminatory treatment by the dominant society, an emotional feeling of concern for their community emerged and the Chicano perspective succeeded in explaining the mechanism of the community's adversity.

In the following chapter, based on the in-depth oral interview results, the author investigates community involvement among some Mexican American youths. Specifically, the author explores how their community engagement affects their identity and perspective by asking them about their experiences of schooling and incidents that attracted them to their community involvement and the related community service engagement.

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[42] Ignacio M. García, 6-7.

CHAPTER FOUR

STATEMENTS ON IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY:

THE ORAL INTERVIEW RESULTS

I . Interview Procedure

A. Participant Recruitment

The research participants were selected from persons who share some characteristics. The author looked for both men and women between the ages eighteen and thirty-three years old. They were expected to identify themselves as of Mexican origin and to be currently engaged in activities assisting the Mexican/Latino community or at least have a voluntary will to participate in community work.

Chain referral, which is commonly called snowball sampling, was employed for the participant recruitment. The author required the interview participants to have some specific characteristics,[1] so those who have the following characteristics were recruited. They identify themselves as of Mexican descent and

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[1] Thomas R. Black, *Evaluating Social Science Research: An Introduction*, (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1993), 50.

voluntarily participate in ethnic community-related activities and contribute in these ways to the improvement of their community. Participants based on these qualifications were selected because the author wanted to explore the reasons why particular youth get involved in their ethnic community while others do not. Thus, in order to identify people who have these characteristics, chain referral was the best method because it is useful to "find members of a group not otherwise visibly identified."[2] Also, the method was preferable considering that this research required strong cooperation of interviewees, and the author needed to look for those who were willing to participate in the research.[3]

The participant sampling was restricted to a particular group of youth. The aim of this participant selection was to focus on the unique experience of a set of youths. The research purpose is not to apply the results from this study to the Mexican American youth in general. The author aims to shed light on a specific youth group in the population by exploring their political consciousness and identity construction and show the dynamic constitution of the youth population of Mexican background.

Participants were recruited via two local Mexican/Latino community service agencies in San José after the author established a connection with the agency

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[2] David R. Krathwohl, *Methods of Educational Social Science Research: An Integrated Approach*, (New York: Longman, 1998), 173.
[3] Roger Sapsford and Victor Jupp eds., *Data Collection and Analysis*, (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1996), 81.

representatives. These agencies serve the local community and especially contribute to the welfare of the Mexican/Latino residents. The agencies also serve non-Latino residents who reside in the area. One agency puts a strong emphasis on educational and youth support services. It offers charter schools as well as tutoring and after-school programs for youth. The other organization works for the promotion of Latino arts and related activities by hosting performances, art exhibitions and auctions.

As a first step to identify the interview participants, the author visited these agencies and asked the representatives to distribute questionnaires among their staff members. The questionnaire asked for background information such as age, ethnicity, and birthplace of the respondents and their parents. It also asks the level of education and the degree of their community involvement and what kind of service work they are engaged in.[4] The author attached stamped envelopes so that they could mail back the completed questionnaires to the author. One agency offered to provide the author with an email list of their staff members. Thus, some questionnaires were distributed directly by the researcher via email based on the agency's staff member list. One participant was found by an interviewee who volunteered to introduce some people to the author as potential interviewees.

The participants are also from a Mexican American student organization at

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[4] For all the questions included in the questionnaire, refer to Appendix A.

San José State University. The author visited the meeting place of the Mexican American student organization on campus. Some of the students filled out the questionnaire on the spot. Some students volunteered that they could ask other members who were not there to fill out the questionnaire and mail it back to the author. As a result of these processes of connection establishment, the author collected the information on the potential interviewees through the distributed questionnaires. Based on the information, a conncection was established with people who had all the characteristics the author expected the interviewees to have.

B. Interview Participants

The author conducted oral interviews with ten people from January 2002 through June 2002. The participants included six women and four men. Their ages ranged from twenty-one to thirty-three years old. All of them identified themselves either as a Mexican or of Mexican descent. Four interviewees were born in Mexico, and most of them moved to the United States with their families at an early age. All of them grew up in California. The majority of the participants' parents immigrated from Mexico. All but two of the participants are bilingual and fluent in Spanish. Spanish usage is still common in their daily life when communicating with their family members and friends. Their formal educational attainment varies from completion of high school to a bachelor's degree. All of them completed high school and also have some post-secondary education including

taking classes from community colleges. Four participants were currently working on an undergraduate program as full-time students. Two of them have completed some work toward a Master's degree.

All of their names were changed in order to protect the participants' privacy, and pseudonyms are used in the thesis.

C. Interview Description

Each oral interview lasted about one hour. The place for the interview was decided according to the convenience and preference of the participants. The interviews were conducted at various locations, including at their house, work place, school library, and a coffee shop. All interviews were conducted in San José, California.

All the interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of each participant. No one refused to allow the tape-recording of their interview by me. Each interview included some questions answered by yes or no, but the majority were open-ended questions. The interviews started with asking how they would describe their ethnic background. Next, the interviewees were asked about their schooling experience. Questions continued about the family support of their education and about college education including the incentive to seek higher education. The author also asked if they have felt any social barriers because of their ethnic origin. Another question asked if they had an opportunity to learn Mexican American

history and their reaction to it. This was to explore if they were knowledgeable or familiar with Chicano history and the Chicano movement and its related perspective and ideology. Lastly, they were asked to talk about their community involvement. The author asked about their motivation for community involvement and if the experience brought any change in their perspective and identity. The author also asked if they identified with the community residents through their involvement, and if they thought the Mexican/Latino community they are serving is suffering from any socioeconomic disadvantages.[5]

II. Aim of the Interview

The interview questions explored how the experience of community involvement stimulates some youths' ethnic consciousness. The aim was also to examine how the experience affects their political consciousness of the societal imbalance and disadvantages the Mexican/Latino community experiences. My assumption is that through engagement in their ethnic community, they come to perceive the social surroundings around their ethnic community critically with a politically-conscious mind.

Yates and Youniss argue that community service work has the function to promote political socialization among youth.[6] The correlation between politically-

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[5] For all the interview questions, refer to Appendix B.
[6] Miranda Yates and James Youniss, "Community Service and Political Identity

active behavior and youth's identity construction is presupposed in their study. Yates and Youniss argue about the relationship between the development of political commitment and identity formation. They point out the intersection between the development of political consciousness and identity formation.

They conducted a case study with high school students, a majority of whom were African Americans. The students participated in a minimum of twenty hours of service programs for homeless people, working in a soup kitchen. They interacted with homeless people there, and got to know the adversity of the life of the underprivileged people.

Yates and Youniss report that through the program the students came to reflect on their roles as individual agents when they engage in social change. Seeing the plight of the people who gather at the shelter, the students come to perceive injustice in society. They start thinking how their individual action could change the social situation and challenge the governmental system.[7]

Yates and Youniss refer to a concept called "moral identity." Morality is considered as one component for the formation of the person's identity. They argue that moral reasoning and behavior allow the individual to define him/herself.[8] As one formulates a moral perspective, the person develops a sense of "social agency."

Development in Adolescence," *Journal of Social Issues* 54-3, (1998): 495-512.
[7] Yates and Youniss, 1998, 500-502.
[8] Youniss and Yates, *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth*, 84.

Social agency is a feeling of responsibility about social phenomena, a desire to bring a change to the social situation.[9] When a sense of social agency develops, the person tries to relate to the social phenomenon, thinking what he/she can do for the improvement of the situation. At the same time, the person reflects what his/her position and role are in society. Thus, by having a moral perspective along with a sense of social agency, the person achieves one stage of his/her identity formation.

The students further reflected on the negative stereotypes of African Americans permeating society when welfare was brought into the discussion in regard to homeless people at the shelter.[10] They saw many black people at the site. Some were young black men of their generation. The meaning of being an African American and its implications in society were examined by the students. Their discussion topics included the biased perception in society of African Americans as troublemakers. The fact that they are associated with drug use, homelessness, and crime, and also the negative media description of African Americans as delinquents, were the center of their criticism.[11]

The students were given an opportunity to think about why the situations at the shelter happen and also the social and historical implications of their ethnic background.[12] Through the discussion they objected to the stereotype of African

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[9] Youniss and Yates, 94.
[10] Yates and Youniss, 1998, 503.
[11] Yates and Youniss, 110-112.
[12] Youniss and Yates, 1997, 99-114.

Americans as homeless. Through the examination of the negative stereotype, they came to see the racialized perception of African Americans in society and that there is a social order determined by the person's racial background.[13]

This study further suggests that the experience in service work may "help an activist sense of identity emerge."[14] Youniss and Yates consider that the experience as an *encounter* provokes "reflection on the meaning of one's membership within a racial or ethnic group" and it is a moment that encourages "the reshaping of one's worldview."[15] It is because the experience at the shelter made them think about "the implications for their own minority status with reference to treatment of other people."[16]

This argument could be applied to the case of Mexican American youth. The author assumes that the youth are in the process of defining their identity through their involvement in the community. In the following section the author will look at the interviewees' statements and examine this hypothesis.

Ⅱ. Interview Content Analysis

A. Self-identification: "How do you describe yourself ?"

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[13] Youniss and Yates, 100-102.
[14] Youniss and Yates, 1997, 113.
[15] Youniss and Yates, 1997, 99.
[16] Youniss and Yates, 1997, 100.

Many interviewees paused for a while and took their time when they were asked the question, "Can you tell me how you describe yourself?" The intention of the question came from the fact that there are several words to refer to persons of Mexican descent, and the author assumed each person has preference to identify him/herself. Three women identified themselves as "Latina." Three males and two females considered themselves a "Chicano" or a "Chicana." Two persons described themselves as "Mexican." The term "Hispanic" has been commonly used in public since 1970s to refer to the people of Spanish-speaking background and the word "Latino" has been replacing it and is getting more prevalent than the former term.[17] While these words encompass a broad range of people, the words "Mexican" and "Mexican American" articulate their national origin.

1. Aversion to the "Hispanic" Label

The term "Hispanic" appeared in the 1970s for the use of the federal government. Soon the term was employed in the U.S. Census and a new category of ethnic group "Hispanic" was created.[18] The term quickly became prevalent in public to identify Spanish-speaking people.

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[17] David E. Hayes-Bautista and J. Chapa. "Latino terminology: conceptual bases for standardized terminology," *American Journal of Public Health* 77, (January 1987), 65.

[18] Martha E. Gimenez, "U.S. Ethnic Politics: Implications for Latin Americans," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, (Fall 1992), 10.

However, at the same time, some critics argued that the terminology was problematic. The term "Hispanic" had a connotation that the people within the group are white and of European descent, neglecting to recognize the fact that the population includes many people of other origins such as indigenous, African, and Asian.[19] It also tends to blur the disparity of socioeconomic status among the population and does not indicate the range in socioeconomic status among the people.[20]

The term is also problematic because of the contradictory nature of the wording. The word was a product of political efforts to obtain the benefits of affirmative action that were sought during the 1970s. Thus, the term was an invention to provide the Spanish-speaking population with a special position as a minority group. However, the irony was that advocates of the term claimed its minority status for a special treatment by the term but they failed to encompass the non-white population within whom had been subordinated and deserved affirmative action. It was not European descendant "Spaniards" who have been under discrimination but rather the people of color within the population.[21] However, they were eliminated from the concept of the "Hispanic."

The other problem is that the term, by labeling the people collectively,

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[19] Gimenez, 11.
[20] Hayes-Bautista and Chapa, 64,
[21] Gimenez, 11.

obscures distinctive histories and identities of subgroups within the population, especially those of indigenous people.[22] Their experience cannot be identical with that of Spanish-origin people because their relationship derived from the colonial era. Thus, to encompass them under one category by the term "Hispanic" is problematic. To recognize the indigenous and mestizo origin within the population is crucial because many of the people consider themselves "mixed race."[23]

Three interviewees referred to the term "Hispanic" when they were answering the question, "How do you describe yourself?" All of them expressed their hesitation to identify themselves as "Hispanics" because of its negative connotation. Maria, a female respondent in her early thirties stated:

> Gosh...ah...I usually identify myself Latino/Latina. Because one...I think the term is very broad and it covers a lot of people because Latino means so much, it means you don't have to be from certain region although I'm from Mexico. I feel that it's very...not as political term as a Hispanic which has always had a huge problem with a lot of...our culture, people. So, I [am] just more comfortable with Latina because it means really broad, broader...because there are so many of us, you know. There are Latin America, Central and South America, and then also Mexico. So, I just think it better term.

She suggested that the word "Latino/Latina" is preferable to identify herself because it is more encompassing than "Hispanic" by implying the political nature of the term.

Stephanie, a female interviewee in her middle-twenties, responded to the same question as follows. Although her parents are from Mexico, she was born and

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[22] Margarita B. Melville, "Hispanics: race, class, or ethnicity?", *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16 (Spring 1988), 68.
[23] Melville, 73-74.

raised in the United States.

> That's a hard one (laugher). Because I think about it a lot. I know I've never described myself as Hispanic. It's just doesn't make sense to me. I most often describe myself as Latina and Mexican... is what I usually describe myself.

She expressed the refusal to identify herself as a "Hispanic" by saying that it "doesn't make sense" to her.

Miguel, a male student in his early twenties, mentioned the term in the following way:

> Now, I consider myself Chicano. But before I used to consider myself Mexican, ah, Hispanic at one point, even though, you know. ...I kind of regret calling myself that.

He articulated the negativity the term "Hispanic" has and said he even feels regret to have described himself as that before.

2. Chicana and Chicano Identity

Five interviewees referred to themselves as "Chicana" or "Chicano" and one person said she tries to use the term. The term underwent a historical development, and the usage of the term has some connotations about the user. Originally the term "Chicano" had been used in the Southwestern states to "refer, somewhat disparagingly, to rural Mexican immigrants"[24] for the purpose of distinguishing the residents of Mexican origin in the area.[25] The use of the term has widely spread

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[24] Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo de Leon, 126.
[25] Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 7.

since the 1960s when political activists of the Chicano movement started employing the word as a label of self-assertion and identification.

"Chicano" is explained at one level as "a term of self-identification used by those persons who were most actively challenging the subordinate position of Mexican American people in the United States."[26] The definition assumes that the person has not only a positive attitude to identify as Mexican descent but also a politically sensitive mind to recognize the inferior condition of the Mexican American community compared with that of the mainstream group. Also, identification as "Chicano" implies that the person is challenging the social surroundings by taking action.

On the another level, Chicano activists and scholars believe that Mexican Americans need to see their socioeconomic situation in a critical and revolutionary way. They consider that the most harmful adversity Mexican Americans underwent was "psychological conquest" as a result of the power domination by Anglo Americans. After the Mexican American War in 1848, Mexican Americans were conquered physically in forms of land deprivation and restricted economic mobility. However, the consequence of the conquest was beyond the physical control by the U.S. Mexican Americans also suffered intellectually from the rampant distorted self-image created by the dominant society. Mexican Americans had been

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[26] F. Chris Garcia and Rudolph O. de la Garza, *The Chicano Political Experience: Three Perspectives*, (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1977), 15.

prevented from having a legitimate history and the correct self-recognition and have been implanted with feelings of inferiority. This notion that Mexican Americans are colonized people underlays the philosophical foundation of Chicano activists and scholars.[27] Thus, the term "Chicano" is associated with an ideological element. It refers to those who disobey the depiction of Mexican Americans by the dominant society and try to articulate their own image and identity.

Stephanie's statement shows her cautious attitude toward the term "Chicana":

> Chicana has a lot of political implications, so I have used it before but I've also been challeng[ed] on using it. Like, what are you doing if you're really Chicana, you know? Are you really acting like a Chicana, and so. Some argue that sometimes I think it depends on who you're talking to.

Her words imply that self-assertion of "Chicana" requires from the person particular actions and behaviors, presumably those that are politically-engaged. So, she seems careful to describe herself as Chicana according to the situation.

Sarah is a female student in her early twenties. Her statement suggests that her identity as a Chicano owes much to her mother. While she was born and raised in the United States, she has been under a strong influence from her Mexican mother in terms of customs and traditions.

> I wish I just could say a Mexican. My mom...she was born in México. And she has so much love for that country that I had grown up

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[27] Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo*, 43-48.

> to have a great appreciation for the history that I know behind... México and the struggle that continues on. But I know that I wasn't born there so I can't say that I'm a Mexican.

She was not willing to "label" herself in any way. It is because she believes that any labeling has a different interpretation according to the individual and it may lead to misunderstanding of the person's background. However, Chicano is a preferred labeling when she needs to describe herself. She states as follows:

> But if I had to, I sometimes label myself as a Chicano. Chicano for me is a child of the earth...so I could label myself as a Chicano with ...honor, pride in being a Mexican. Specially from my mother.

Alicia, a female student in her early twenties, was explicit in her identity as a Chicana. She was born in the United States but has experience attending pre-school and kindergarten for a few years in Mexico. Asked the reason for her choice of identify, she stated:

> Ah, I think because it's an ideology as well as a philosophy or state of mind. I've been a Mexican when growing up in the United States, which is growing up very different and experiencing different things...I just gonna say it's social, political choice of stating who I am as a person within society...it's...cultural significance, too. That I do have tools being Mexican and...or being raised in America... You experience a lot here.

She clearly stated that to identify as a "Chicana" gives her a positive foundation to live in this diverse society enabling her to state "who I am."

Ignacio, a male student in his early twenties, remarked on his identity as follows:

> I say Chicano most of the time. For me Chicano...isn't just someone who is a Mexican American. For me the term also...[by the term] I

> describe my social, political consciousness. For me Chicano is something that I call myself. ...Nothing is more descriptive. Like bringing in an ideology,...my ethnicity also. It's more compelete... [than the term] "Mexican hyphen American."

Ignacio also commented that his involvement in the Chicano student organization and participation in classes of Mexican American Studies were significant. Those experiences make him identify as a Chicano. They enable him to define himself, rather than merely take the label of Mexican American.

He described Chicano identity as a consciousness to express his social, political perspective. For him it is the most effective term of self-assertion. The way Ignacio and Alicia identify themselves as a Chicana/o is similar on the point that it is a manifestation of their awareness of their political and social world. The author speculates that they suggest by the words "social, political choice" and "social, political consciousness" that they have a distinctive perspective as Chicana/os. The identity is a manifestation of a self-pride toward their ethnic background and also an expression of their worldview to recognize unfairness in the social system and a desire to rectify it.

Mario, a male in his early thirties, said without a pause that he identified as a Chicano. Being born and raised in the United States, he does not have a direct connection to Mexico and neither does he speak Spanish. The reason why he feels comfortable with a Chicano identity is because his father identified as a Chicano. He has been familiar with that identity as his son. He has used Chicano and Mexican interchangeably because he did not think "a lot of people knew what

Chicano meant." That is why he described himself as a Mexican instead of a Chicano on more occasions. Even though he is not from Mexico, he does not hesitate to call himself a Mexican.

Chicano activists assert that Mexican Americans are defined "as *mestizos*, mixed race people."[28] Their emphasis is on the indigenous origin of the people.[29] However, the interviewees who described themselves a Chicana/o did not mention this racial implication the term Chicano has. What their statements suggest is that Chicano identity is more of attitude and perspective rather than racial factor. For example, a person identifies as a Chicano because the person believes he/she does not belong to the category of white. The person may adopt Chicano identity even if he/she has a light skin color and an appearance similar to that of European descent.

The point is that they hold a different perspective from that of the social mainstream, that is, Anglo Americans. Acknowledging their indigenous roots signified their position not to be influenced by Euro-centric values.[30] Chicano activists adopted symbols of indigenous aspects of Mexican culture. One of the representations was a concept of Aztlán. The former Mexican American generations emphasized their similarities to the Anglo mainstream. However, the Chicano generation chose to demonstrate their indigenous aspect and mark a

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[28] Muños Jr., 15.
[29] Ignacio M. García, 71-72.
[30] Ignacio M. García, 71.

distinction between their background and the white, Anglo culture.

Chicanos are persons who recognize that they are not white but, further, they do "not want to be white."[31] This means that they do not want to accord with the white, Anglo American values. The Chicano perspective was a radical change from that of Mexican American generations in the past.[32] In the case of the interviewees of this study, the negative attitude toward the Anglo dominance plays a more powerful role than the consideration of their racial origin in their identification as a Chicana/o.

Five people out of ten interviewees identified as a Chicana/o. However, this result may not be applied to the other youths of Mexican background in public. The high percentage among my interviewees to adopt Chicano identity was due to the fact the author recruited the participants with particular characteristics.

3. Incidents that Affect their Self-Identification

From Experiences at School

Some interviewees spoke about specific incidents which gave them a crucial moment to appreciate their Mexican heritage and background. Three interviewees mentioned such experiences happened at school through Mexican American Studies classes. Learning about historical experiences of the Mexican American

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[31] Ignacio M. García, 72.
[32] Muños, Jr., 15.

community made them appreciate their cultural heritage and have pride in their background.

Mario took some classes in Chicano studies at a local community college. Learning about Mexican American history had a decisive effect on his identification as a Chicano. He described the experience as an incentive to adopt this identity:

> Then, a lot had to do with actually going to...[the name of the community college he attends] and taking some Chicano Studies classes and getting more knowledge about where the name came from, and the movement and all that. And that...more cemented... my desire to be called Chicano.

He indicated that Chicano Studies classes induced his "desire" to identify himself as a Chicano.

Further, Mario described his feeling of taking these classes:

> It was wonderful 'cause it wasn't anything I was taught before, so... it was all new except for the most basic people like César Chávez... a lot of names and stories were new, ah, it was wonderful just to hear...what kind of role Mexican Americans had had in the South-west from way, way, way back. ...And also hearing even...about the movement, the Chicano Movement in the early seventies, because as going to public school, even a little bit about the Civil Rights Movements and Martin Luther King...but that was it. You didn't hear about [Chicano Movement]... It was a revolution, really nice to hear that that did happen. Just you didn't hear about it.

His comment suggests that in the public schools he attended there was no opportunity to learn Mexican American history. The experience in the community college was fresh and new because it was the first time he was exposed to history specifically focusing on Mexican Americans. His statement demonstrates that even today not all Mexican American students have a chance to learn Mexican American

history at school. The earlier Chicano generation had demanded strongly the inclusion of Mexican American Studies in the school curriculum. The inclusion of this topic signified that a desire of self-determination of the Mexican American community had been realized.[33] It gave them an importance in terms of gaining an acknowledgement from the mainstream society toward Mexican American history. However, his statement suggests that even today the incorporation of Mexican American Studies has not yet occurred on a larger-scale level at schools.

Miguel is taking classes in Mexican American Studies offered at a university. His statement suggests that as he became more knowledgeable about history and experience of Mexican Americans, it made him consider his identity and choose an appropriate one.

> It's weird. The more I become educated about my culture, the different identities that I try to choose for myself. [The interviewer's interrogation, "So, it's changing?"] Yes, it's changing.

The author infers that the power of the acquired knowledge through his college education has been influential upon his identity formation.

Maria described her experience and the impact of a Chicano Studies class that she took for the first time in college. It provided her with a positive feeling and recognition about her cultural background:

> I actually took a class, one of my first classes in college was...I can't think of the name, but it was a speech class taught through the Mexican American [Studies] Department. And that class was really actually very good because it really opened my mind to see that not

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[33] Muños Jr., 77, 82-83.

> all Mexicans... Our culture has contributed so much to not only American society but we have such a rich culture and so much history. And [it] really made me proud of what I am. ...Let me see beyond what sometimes society says, beyond [what] you're taught in school. There's so much more to the world than that, you know. ...It opened my mind. And I still continue to read about my culture and my history, and that really gives me more sense of identity.

Her statement suggests that by taking the class in college she found that the larger society had not been appreciating the Mexican Americans and their heritage. The Chicano Studies class offered her the description of her people beyond the stereotypes believed by society. That experience motivated her to keep learning Mexican American history and culture.

Identity Transformed: "A State of Mind"

Two interviewees talked about how their identity was transformed through specific incidents. These were not directly from their classes at school. Their experience occurred through the popular culture and from the social environment affected by politics. Each of the incidents provided them with a turning point of their self-assertion. Their statements show how they came to adopt their identity, which suggests that their current identity was a matter of choice.

As mentioned above, Miguel experienced his identity transforming over the years. He referred to three identities he used in the past, Mexican, Hispanic, and he currently identifies as a Chicano. He described a unique experience leading him to his identity. He explained why he came to identify himself as a Chicano:

> Oh, Chicano? I have to say it's kind of funny. It's like there is a

> joke in Culture Clash, ah, a comedy trio, Chicano comedians. And the joke would be like, "Oh, I was Chicano before you." Because Chicano is not a nationality, it's more state of mind, the way you think. ...I've kind of developed and consider myself one now. It was in November, when I decided I needed to change my identity as I tried to develop my own thoughts and ideas about who I am and who I'm gonna become. ...I guess I was born...November, 2001... Still new. I'm new-born Chicano.

"Culture Clash" is a well-known Latino comedy group and their performances portray minority experiences and interactions among diverse cultures. Miguel believes Chicano identity is not determined by his or her birthplace. It is not a nationality. Rather, it is a "state of mind," so it is possible for the person to adopt and claim Chicana/o once when the person wishes to do so. It is interesting that he described himself as a "new-born Chicano." It is his metaphor suggesting that Chicano identity is determined according to the person's mind, that is, when he or she chooses to adopt the Chicano perspective.

Ignacio said it was during the high school years when he adopted the Chicano identity for the first time. Until that time he said to people that "I'm an American." He described himself at that time "More or less Mexican American but I was more American."

He explained there were two factors that made him reflect upon his background and identity. One is that he learned Chicano Studies by himself through reading some books. He stated that "The more I learned, the more I felt comfortable with the term Chicano."

> Around the same time I was getting more into Chicano Studies. I

> picked up a random book at the library. One time I was researching Aztecs. And I saw a book on Chicanos. ...There was a lot more, a lot more American history than what's taught in school.

The other is an incident he experienced at a private high school he once attended. He described the experience as follows:

> At that time [it] was during the whole thing was 187, Proposition 187...was anti-immigration proposition. And at that time I was at a private high school which is mostly white. So, there was a lot of backlash toward Mexican Americans... As a combination of two things that's why I became more politically-involved in. ...I got a lot of negative comments from the white students, like "Go back to Mexico." I got a lot of fights... They didn't talk to us while in class.

This experience provided him with opportunities to become both knowledgeable and sensitive to his ethnic background. Through the interaction with white peers, he realized that his background was marginalized. His case demonstrates that school is a mainstream institution where individuals of minority background sometimes face a negative response to their background. The author speculates that these two experiences reinforced his desire for seeking an identity that he wanted to positively claim.

In their statements we can see two elements regarding Chicano identity. One is that Chicano identification involves a philosophical consideration. As Miguel stated, it is a "state of mind" and "the way you think." Secondly, a Chicano identity accompanies a politically-sensitive mind. Ignacio chose to adopt a Chicano identity when he faced antagonism toward Mexican Americans from white students. When he witnessed backlash against his background, he felt he had to resist against it. The author speculates that he wanted to demonstrate his political

stance by adopting a Chicano identity because it signified a defiance of a social force to subordinate Mexican Americans.

Ambiguous Identity: "Half Way in the Middle"

Some interviewees expressed their ambiguity about their position in relation to the larger society. They referred to their bicultural background and experience deriving from the fact that their parents are from Mexico. Some of their parents maintain traditional Mexican styles and perspectives in raising their children. Although some were born in Mexico, all the interviewees were raised in the United States and became Americanized as a result of being socialized in U.S. institutions.

Maria mentioned her feeling on her position of mid-way between two cultures:

> The reason why I identify with Latina is because I was born in Mexico, so it's hard for me to identify myself as Chicana. Because although I was born in Mexico, I was raised here. I'm, I feel, kind of middle of the two worlds, you know. I'm in the middle of my half with...my Mexican roots, but I grew up here and I have so much... more Americanized.

Maria felt that Chicana identity did not apply to her because she was from Mexico. The author speculates that her family maintained a strong Mexican culture. While she was raised in that home, she became Americanized, socializing with many American friends. But at the same time, she is not fully an American, nor a Mexican. For Maria it is hard to call herself a Chicana because her experience as a child of Mexican immigrant is not identical with that of Mexican Americans here.

Stephanie, who was born in the United States, described the feeling of her ambiguous identity as follows:

> I grew up in American culture and went to school that was largely the American culture. But my home culture was very much old world Mexico. My parents are from a small town...they lived most of their life in a small town... And...I definitely felt a clash between the cultures...so like I felt like, my dad wants us to grow up like good Mexican Catholic girls. And that was very different from that we were influenced by schools.

She grew up in a white neighborhood and the schools she attended had a predominantly white student population. The socialization patterns she undertook at school and at home were different, and she did not know how to reconcile the gap. The values from her Mexican parents and the culture at school, which was of the white Anglo mainstream, were in conflict. She "grew up for long time trying to fit in that culture [at school]," but she was "never quite doing it." She has had a feeling of isolation at school when she has faced insensitive comments from the Mexican classmates regarding her identity.

> And so, then high school again, I remember getting comments from people, like, when I would say I was Mexican, because I didn't hang out with the rest of the Mexicans and because they didn't think I looked Mexican enough. I would get comments like, "What do you mean you are Mexican? You too white to be Mexican," you know. And so, I didn't know what I was.

In addition to the isolation from the white school culture, Stephanie struggled emotionally through the interaction with Mexican classmates. They did not recognize her as their peer because of her light skin color and her Spanish "from Europe." Her self-identity as a Mexican did not coincide with the one recognized

by others. It caused a serious frustration in her identity, which made her feel that "I didn't know what I was."

Stephanie's experience demonstrates a consistent pattern of ambiguous identity among Mexican American youth. It was a persistent issue that the previous generations have faced since the early twentieth century. Their ambiguous position derives from a disparity between the nature of socialization at home and the treatment from the larger society. School is a place where they are exposed to the dominant social value for the first time, and they find a difference from their experience at home. They realize that their socialization pattern at home is distinctive and that they are marginalized at school as they are in the larger society. This recognition leads to ambivalent consciousness toward their identity.

Also, her statement shows how stereotypes toward Mexicans permeating society caused her ambiguous self-perception. People did not recognize Stephanie as a person of Mexican origin from her light skin color. Mexican peers at her school isolated her because she did not speak Spanish as they did. Others thought that her socialization behavior was not that of a Mexican. These facts suggest that stereotypes have a powerful effect on the people's judgement regarding the person's background and behavior. Stephanie struggled because her appearance and a socialization pattern were not in accord with stereotypical notions in public regarding people of Mexican background.

Moment of Self-Affirmation

While Stephanie was feeling frustration, she finally experienced the transformation of self-perception, which occurred by reading the works of Chicano and Mexican American poets and writers.

The words from people at school who did not recognize Stephanie as a Mexican hurt her very much. It was because she knew her family history going back for generations and she could trace her ancestors even back to someone from Spain. She got angry with the comments from classmates because she knew her family history and did have Mexican roots, but some people did not recognize her Mexican identity. Stephanie described her feeling at that time as follows:

> I got really hurt by that. I didn't know how to deal with that. But in school, when I went to college, there were a lot of poets and a lot of writers that express the same sort of feeling of, "Hey, we're not of one color." Even as Mexicans and Chicanos, we're not of one color. And that whole recognizing the multitude of diversity... I mean, Latinos as a population of Cubans, Ecuadorians, and Mexicans. And then, Mexicans...being such a diverse combination. You can be a lot Spanish, get a little Spanish, get a lot indigenous, a little indigenous... And all of that helped me work through my personal denial of who I was. And also getting a new sense of pride in my history.

Her statement shows that she went through a struggle because she was denied her identity. That struggle derived from the limited perception in society toward the Mexican population. Based on permeating stereotypes, people blindly assume that Mexicans have a specific appearance, English articulation, and socialization pattern. These notions blur the diversity within the population. When she read the works of Chicano writers, they provided her with a confidence in

her self-recognition. It was because those writers acknowledge the diverse make up of the Mexican population and everyone can find a place within that identity. The fact that she shared experience with the writers as a Mexican in the United States helped her to gain a pride in her identity.

B. Community Involvement

All the interview participants are involved in the Mexican/Latino community in various ways and levels. Most of them are paid staff members and employees, but some are volunteers who help with the work at the organizations occasionally. One person is an assistant director of a community service agency and one is engaged in community outreach in a local government office.

The interviewees talked about their views toward the community they served and their notion about the social conditions surrounding their community. Through their statements on the community work, their political consciousness and perspective are explored.

1. Attitude Toward the Mexican Community

The author asked all interviewees the question, "Do you feel the Mexican/Latino community you are involved in is suffering from any disadvantage such as socioeconomic or any other?" It is because the author believes that their recognition of the community situation is suggestive in terms of their decision to

pursue community involvement. The author expected their answer to demonstrate the degree of their recognition that community issues are attributed to discrimination or lack of understanding in society. The assumption was that their statements on this question would reflect the degree of their identification with their community.

All the interviewees recognized that some forms of disadvantage exist among the people in the Mexican/Latino community. They agreed that the community they serve needs lots of support and a fair treatment and recognition from mainstream society. However, each individual has a different understanding of why the community has these disadvantages or why there are social barriers preventing the people from upward mobility.

Teresa, who is working at the community service agency which serves many Mexican/Latino residents, responded to the question, "Have you felt any social barriers which prevented you from achieving higher goals or success?" as follows:

> Sure. I haven't had many personal experiences, but...to speak just from my culture itself, I think there's many barriers. One is the language barrier. They...people come to this country without knowing the language. And our place is classrooms and classes, that are ESL, for example. BUT don't get the same opportunity to have college prep-course which they always stay behind, stay behind.

Further, she emphasized that stereotypes against the Mexican/Latino population are harmful for their community advancement.

> And also stereotypes. We're stereotyped, as I mentioned before to be seen as uneducated, ignorant... Yet, we're put in that category that many times people believe it so much that they don't vision more success in their lives. Because they say, "No, this is what I've been told that I am. Therefore, I shouldn't."

She believes that these stereotypes implanted by society become internalized among the Mexican/Latino youth. They are harmful because they limit the capability and potential of the youth in the community. This statement is similar to the Chicano perspective. Prejudice is harmful not only because it creates a distorted recognition in society but also because it is internalized among the Chicano youth. When the negative self-image is internalized, the individual cannot get out of the image and becomes vulnerable to a stereotypical notion of him/herself imposed by the larger society. A negative self-image becomes the worst adversity for the youth because it prevents them from having a positive self-recognition. Teresa did not mention Chicano philosophy itself, but her concern about stereotypes against the Mexican/Latino youth has a warning in common with Chicano philosophy.

Alicia showed a similar perspective to Teresa's on the disadvantages the Mexican/Latino community has. She described her view regarding socioeconomic disadvantages that her community has:

> People in my community? ...Yeah, I think we do have disadvantages. We attend schools that [have] less resources. They have people that don't speak our language [Spanish] who don't understand our culture. We live in areas that are low socio-economic level... They live in a poor area... 'cause a lot of stress to young child. ...It brings a school system that's not very welcoming many times...not just supportive who he is or who she is.

Her comment reflects the fact that there has been a repeated pattern of educational inequality. As LULAC members found overcrowded Mexican schools

with inferior conditions in the 1930s, the Mexican community today still confronts educational disadvantage deriving from the unbalanced distributions of money, school facilities, and quality of the curriculum.

Stephanie talked about the Latino youths she interacts with through the community work. She felt that the children were seriously behind the expected academic achievement and recognized that the disadvantages the youths were facing needed to be removed. Regarding the reason why she began getting involved in the community work, Stephanie remarked:

> I wanna see these kids...get an advantage more than...I mean they don't have an advantage. They have disadvantage right now. Such a severe disadvantage. Their school district is just at the bottom rank. And (I wanna see) being able to get them at least at same level with the kids that they [are] gonna be competing at least in the public school system.

She expressed her wish that these youths overcome this disadvantage and obtain an equal educational opportunity.

Ignacio also commented on social disadvantages he thought the Mexican community was facing. He specified the disadvantages in the educational system and mentioned tracking:

> I see a lot, definitely. Education is a big thing, I think. Like I men-mentioned tracking before. I feel it still takes place, I think. Especially Mexican Americans are geared toward more manual stuff labor. ...My sisters actually, at one point, when they're graduating... the counselor about college told [them] not to go to junior college, just go work at restaurant or go somewhere else... I see with my family. I've seen with other kids. ...Just from my personal experience, I know there's disadvantage.

Tracking is an issue that has been affecting the socioeconomic status of the

Mexican American community. It is an educational practice to sort out a particular group of students into specific school curriculum. Historically, those students included many children of Mexican origin, and they were assigned vocational, non-academic classes. The tracking system was upheld by a notion that Mexican students would drop out at an early age and they would become unskilled workers.[34]

Ignacio's statement on tracking is articulate, and he is sensitive of educational disadvantage because it was based on his own experience. His statement demonstrates that Mexican American youth tend to be relegated to a particular segment of occupations in society. The effect of tracking is to provide limited education to Mexican youth, which has been a historical issue for the Mexican American community.

Linda, a woman in her middle twenties, has been participating in volunteer work since her high school years when she began working to assist children from low-income families. Now she does volunteer work occasionally at an organization serving the promotion of Latino arts.

Her recognition of the Mexican/Latino community has dual sides. Her statements suggest that her perception includes both that of as an insider and an outsider. She answered a question, "Do you think the local Latino community has social disadvantages?" as follows:

I think so. There's an area overall, because this is such a heav[il]y

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[34] Gonzalez, 77-85.

> Hispanic population, when other cultures look at the Hispanic or Latino community, there are usually a negative...I think there's a negative feel towards the Latino population. And I think a lot has to do with misunderstanding, not understanding the background and where people are from and why they are here.

Linda thinks that a lack of correct knowledge about Latinos by people in society causes prejudice against Latinos. However, at the same time, she believes that the individual's effort is necessary for the Latino community to overcome prejudice. The author asked her if she recognized any disadvantage to the community. She was further asked if so, which she thought was a powerful cause of the disadvantage, the lack of the community's own efforts or prejudice from outside. She answered as follows:

> Ah...I think it's a kind of a combination of the two. I feel a lot of people don't do anything to help themselves. I know people that have moms who have lived here for twenty years and don't know a word of English. You know, they never learned English because they live in a small Latino community where you don't need to know English. So, they get [out of] outside the community, they're treated with prejudice because they can't communicate. So, self-help is definitely important.

She believes that it is important for Latinos to show the larger society that they have capability to succeed in society so that others should not treat them with prejudice.

> I think going to college and getting yourself out of the little community and a job somewhere else with a college degree with experience is definitely a way to help yourself. Because you can then show people that you're not stupid or that you're...the Latino community is not ignorant. But if you stay in that little community, don't expand, don't go to school, don't learn English...then, of course people [are] not gonna attempt to treat you differently.

She suggested that Latinos should not be vulnerable to discrimination. While she recognized there is a misunderstanding in society toward Latinos, she

asserted they should make efforts to change themselves. So, the Latino community needs to improve itself with education and any other skills necessary to integrate into society. They need to show to the mainstream society that they are capable enough to compete with them.

2. Identification with the Community

While they are working in the community, do they feel a connection with the people of the community? This is one of the questions posed during the interviews. The author expected that all the interviewees would have a strong sense of identification with the community because they voluntarily chose to engage in the community work. The interview results revealed that the degree of their identification with the community differs according to their backgrounds, such as family situation, the place of residence, and their school experiences.

Alicia showed strong identification with her community because she called herself as a Chicana. She said "Being exhilarated by my community, helping others...and definitely standing for what's right...just work with my people to move forward" is her feeling when she identifies herself as a Chicana. Also, she mentioned people of Mexican/Latino community as "my people" several times during the interview. This shows her consistent identification with the community she is involved in.

Maria responded to the question, "During your community work, do you

identify yourself with the people there?" instantly:

> Oh, yeah, definitely, definitely. I see a lot of my parents in them, you know. My aunt, my grandmother, my uncle, you know. For example, when I was working with a day-worker organization and went there to see their center. And right away I was so emotional because it reminds me of my family. Their people are here from Mexico...

She felt such a compassion to the people because Maria has the experience as a daughter of an immigrant family. She sees her experience reflected in the people when she participates with the community activities.

> I really identify because I've been there. ...I've never been a day-worker but I've worked out in the field. I know the hardships and difficulties, challenges. So, I always identify myself...with any minorities. I know what it is. To be like a minority.

Ignacio demonstrated a similar feeling to Maria's toward people in his community. He identifies with them because he can relate their situation to his own past:

> Yeah. I saw a lot of things [during the involvement in the community]. That reminds me of myself...when I was at their age. When I help with farm workers...my family was farm worker family. My grandparents were farm workers. My mom was a farm worker at one point... It reminds me of my family.

He also expressed a strong sense of belonging to his community. He described the reason why he became involved in the community:

> I just feel like that opportunity I was given by certain people, like special attention or...that I can repay them by doing the same thing. ...I can't just defend myself by what I've done. I also have to take into account for my community... So, I need to have a relationship with my community.

Ignacio emphasized that his connection to his community is important to him. He feels what he is today, he owes to others' support. The author speculates that

feeling keeps him involved in community work.

Sarah replied to the same question as follows:

> Oh, yeah. Yeah, I could...because just like them, especially with the high school or junior high school students. I could identify with them because I was there once. ...I know how [it] feel[s] to be put down or I know how [it] feel[s] having an ambition to go to college but not knowing how to get there. I feel I could identify with them in a sense that we came from the similar background, similar experiences.

Some other interviewees also expressed their feeling of identification with the community they serve. Mario replied to a question asking if he identifies with the people in the community, "Yeah, I do. There's a certain amount of comfort, I think." Teresa described her feeling of her consciousness through the community work, "I just feel closer. Closer to the Latino community."

While the majority of the interviewees answered that they identify themselves with the community and the people they are involved with, some persons expressed a different perspective on the community regarding their sense of identification.

Stephanie responded as follows to the question, "When you are interacting with people in the community, do you feel a connection with them?":

> No. And I think that's again because I grew up as a Mexican...child in a predominantly white neighborhood and white school. And...my Spanish isn't as good as theirs. ...On the language level I don't feel, I feel like sometimes there is a barrier there. ...Also, because I didn't grow up in a community that was largely Mexican, I didn't have the same experience that they had.

Her comment suggests that there is a barrier among Mexican American youths over Spanish usage. The language usage is an important factor for one's sense of belonging. In Stephanie's case, her limited Spanish fluency creates a distinction in identity between her and the people in the community.

She did not hesitate to admit that she had a different experience and background from the people in the community and that is why she does not identify with the people. She also said, "And I know that and see that everyday."

However, this fact does not affect her willingness to engage in community work. She stated that "They [people working in the service agency] have made an ideological or philosophical decision in their life [that] they want to serve the Latino community. And I have." She meant that she shared the ideological or philosophical perspective to serve the community. Even if she does not feel herself identical with the people, there is no contradiction. The fact that she really cares for the people in the community is the most crucial for her to participate in the community work.

Linda also expressed a feeling of distance between herself and the community. The author asked her, "Do you identify yourself with the people in the community?" She answered "Sometimes, not all the times. Most of the time, not really."

Linda suggested that it is because she is from Mexico and grew up there until the early grades of elementary school. The agency that she helps hosts events

and exhibitions related to Mexican American culture and arts. She commented on them as follows:

> I don't really relate to too much because it has to do with...more the Mexican American empowerment movement. I'm not too familiar or into that. ...They sometimes go to the more Mexican American power, ah...Chicano kind of thing. [The researcher's interrogation, "More political?"] More political and more of people that Mexican Americans that were born here...type of thing.

Her statement demonstrates that there is a difference between the experiences of the first generation Mexicans and that of Mexican Americans born and raised in the United States. She did not relate to the Chicano exhibition very much because she considered herself a Mexican and not a Mexican American or a Chicano.

Daniel is one male interviewee in his early thirties who is highly involved in the local Mexican/Latino community at a broad-level and in various aspects. He described as follows the incentive for his involvement in the community:

> I care about people. And my case, I'm Mexican. Very Mexican in my culture and every aspect. And I care about the fact that they're not represented, listened to, so not only do I care about people I feel I'm in a position of influence and it's my responsibility to do what I can to help Mexican Americans. I'm not a blood-based. ...I genuinely care.

His statement suggests his concern for people of Mexican descent who are under privileged. But he suggested that his incentive was not so much ethnically motivated as a desire to help people in struggles.

He mentioned the interaction he had in college with his friends who were active in the Chicano student organization. He found a different perspective when he was exposed to their ideology. He stated:

> The way you [students in Chicano organizations] are thinking is... you try to segregate yourself from the rest of the student population. By saying that everybody is racist against you. That's the thinking that you see with some of the organizations.

He respected their efforts in assisting the Mexican community and helped their work occasionally. However, he found a conflict between their Chicano ideology and his perspective. His statement suggested that he sought a social change in his own way through his career:

> You know, I'm here to get education. I'm gonna prepare myself. So, when I graduate I can be able to get into the system and change it. So, it better serves the Mexican community. ...I know my priority is to get the best education...I'm able to make the difference to work in the system rather than fighting against it.

3. Recognition of Injustice

Some interviewees mentioned the word "social injustice." By the term they expressed their perception of unfairness or unbalanced resource distribution in society. Maria described when she became aware of social injustice and how that recognition motivated her to seek higher education and other achievements. Maria stated that she has aspired to achieve something more than what she saw in her immediate surroundings. She explained that it was deeply related to the fact that her family was farm workers and she witnessed what happened around their life. She described her experience:

> I grew up with my uncle and aunt, my grandmother. I think doing a hard labor and looking at the injustices that happened...like treatment how we used to get treated like second-class citizen. I think that really motivated me [to go to college]. And say, you know, why, why, why can't I be in that position? Why there's these dif-

> ference between me and white, my uncle's boss's kids? There's no difference...

Maria experienced another form of injustice as a woman. When the author asked her "Did you have an opportunity to speak about such injustices even at home?", she replied:

> Yeah. I think Latina, especially women, I think...there's a lot of struggles and challenges they have to face. Because, at least my family I'm not saying every family, but you're seen as a care-taker. Also, you're seen as, hey, you serve the meal, kind of thing... I cannot stand that. That was something I cannot stand. I didn't wanna be that, that person.

These experiences of perceiving social inequality were very powerful for her. It kept influencing her for many years. She further stated:

> I think I always had that drive. For whatever the reason they've always been driving me. Because I think I saw social injustices that were around me even as a child. And I always knew that I wanted to do something better than what I was at.

The author speculates that she became sensitive to social inequality through her own life experience. She remarked that "I saw a lot of things...a lot of imbalances, and all the things I thought that were right and didn't make any logical thought." The author assumes that her sense of being sensitive to unfairness contributed in some part to her choice of working for the community relation service at the local government.

Miguel demonstrated his perception of social injustice as follows:

> Every year mayor [and other] people in other community...are satisfied with having quarter of whole community dropped out of high school. ...I think that's the whole part of learning about self-determination. You see injustice. And you fight to change that. You know, social change. So, you don't just accept that.

He also remarked that when he was a high school student, he did not recognize the racism and segregation in his hometown. According to his words, "Everything was ok" there. He looked back at that time and considered that the social injustice did exist and realized that "No one helps the Chicano community specifically." He mentioned the words "self-determination" and "social change." Through these words he expressed his desire to resist what he perceived as social problems or injustice.

Mario also remarked on his perception of society and its relation to the Latino community:

> It's kind of hard they [Latino community] have to believe in the system that maybe hasn't always treated them so well. ...But you have to try and get them to believe in a system in the past that has been kind of corrupt. They have to make them understand the only way to change it. I mean, because there's no way people are gonna rise up and revolutionize the country. ...It's not gonna happen. The only way...you have to work with the system. You have to convince people to work with the system...to vote and that kind of thing. And even to protest, too. But, ah...yeah, it's kind of tough. You have to get them [to] believe in the system that hasn't believed in them. So, that might be difficult.

His thought is similar to that of Miguel in recognizing that social change is necessary for the betterment of the Latino community. However, he emphasized that change will be realized through the efforts of working within the current social system. While admitting the larger society did not function well for the Latino community, he contended that they still need to tackle the social system and learn to acquire the benefits from it.

Although not mentioning the word "social injustice," Sarah's statement implies that she experienced something similar to an injustice. She described her own experience of an unfair treatment imposed on her at school. When she decided to go to college, she found that her high school teachers were not very supportive. She recalled that "They [teachers at her school] pretty much told me I should not apply [to] college because there's no way I would get in." Sarah explained why she thought it happened:

> Just because they [high school teachers] already have an outlook of who they think you are..."She is a girl. She is probably not able to go to college." You know? They know your background, so they kind of don't give you the...support. I already think I didn't get the support I need in high school.

However, she did not give up. She further stated:

> I don't know why [the teachers told her not to apply to college]. I had the motivation. I mean, I wasn't the greatest student in high school. ...But as long as the motivation...I did. So, I applied.

She received admissions from two schools out of three she applied to. Her excitement was big because she knew "Other people who looked down on me, thought I won't get in." Now she has been studying for a few years at a university. Her statement suggests Sarah felt a strong anger toward an injustice that almost tracked her into a non-college preparation. She recalled that "They [teachers] already had a different outlook for my life after high school." In order to resist their perception, she firmly decided to go to college "Just to prove to them, my counselor...that I could get in and I was gonna survive."

Summary

Each interviewee has a different degree of identification with the community. Some stated that they do not identify with the people they serve because their family, neighborhood, and school circumstances are different. However, all the interviewees demonstrated a high level of care and concern for the Mexican/Latino community where they are involved.

Five interviewees have personal experiences of unfair treatment, which they perceived discriminatory based on their background. These persons are sensitive to the issues in the Mexican/Latino community, especially the conditions that create disadvantages for the lives of people in the community. When the person went through such an individual experience, the incident motivated the person to seek higher achievement either in education or career to prove their capability.

Not all interviewees have personal experiences of discrimination. To the question, "Have you felt any social barriers hindering you from achieving success or higher education?" four interviewees answered that they have not. However, their answers recognized that in certain circumstances discrimination could take place. One interviewee said that the expected barrier would be lower if the person had light skin color. The other interviewee remarked that if the person were in a school district with much less financial resources, it would be difficult to obtain the educational advantages. Even if they did not face those barriers personally, they all recognize that the social barriers exist in the Mexican/Latino community which

hinder their social mobility.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to explore how community involvement relates to the development of social responsibility and identity among some youths of Mexican origin. Community involvement was focused on because the author assumed that it would reflect youth's political consciousness as one component of social responsibility through their service work. The author had interviews with youths who were engaged in community work and did not have a comparative group of youth. However, the study findings demonstrated a correlation between identity and community involvement of the youths.

As Youniss and Yates argue in their finding, the author had an assumption that community service experience expands the young participants' worldview and works to nurture a sense of social responsibility. From the interviewees'statements of this study, the author did not see that the experience of community work specifically contributed to formulate their worldview. Interview statements suggest that in most of the cases, they already possessed a particular perspective when they began to be involved in the community work. The interview results suggest that

the prior individual experience was critical to formulate the person's political consciousness and the related perception. The occasion and character of these experiences vary according to the individual. Some interviewees found an unfairness in the social system and had witnessed their family members face discriminatory treatment. Some of them personally experienced unjust treatment themselves.

It is not clear from the interview findings whether the youths get involved in the community work because they already have a strong sense of social responsibility or whether their political consciousness is nurtured through the community involvement. This study results demonstrate that the youths with community engagement are sensitive to social phenomena that are not always fair and impose disadvantages on the Mexican/Latino community. The direct correlation between their community work and their political awareness is not clear, but at least this finding suggests that community experience reinforces the person's political consciousness. The author speculates it is because they witness the actual hardships that people in a community are facing. Through the involvement, the youths come to share the difficulty of their struggle and recognize the reality of people's lives. Beyond having that recognition, the youths reflect upon why some people have specific struggles while others do not through the community involvement.

The hypothesis was that educational experience plays a crucial role to form

social and political consciousness among youth. The interview findings verified this hypothesis. Most of the interviewees had experiences at school which gave them an impetus to change their perspective on the larger world or make them reflect upon their identity. For example, they faced unfavorable treatment or unsatisfactory instruction by teachers or had negative comments from peers based on their ethnic background. After these incidents they questioned why they happened and the role of their background. In many cases the interviewees found a solution to resolve the inner conflict by gaining knowledge about Mexican American history and experience. Some interviewees related their experience to Mexican American history and literature. By learning their community experience, they found a source of pride which helped them attain a positive self-identity. For some individuals, learning about Mexican American history gave them a new perspective to understand the social surroundings to affect their sense of belonging. Learning the Mexican American experience enabled them to be proud of their background and helped them to develop a positive and new identity.

The other hypothesis was that having knowledge about Mexican American history encouraged the youths to work for their community. The author assumed that the knowledge raises among the youths a sense of compassion to the community and further stimulates a collective consciousness as a group who share a common historical experience. The finding of this study revealed that being knowledgeable of Mexican American history does not always accompany the youths identifying

with the people in the community. This is explained by the interviewees' varieties of background. The degree of identification differs according to the interviewee's family situation, the neighborhood where they grew up, and the socialization experiences, including schooling. However, all of my interviewees demonstrated a high level of compassion for their community. Thus, their community involvement is grounded not only on a sense of identification with the community, but also a compassion and concern for the community which is also a powerful factor.

The youths the author interviewed have a variety of backgrounds. Even though they share Mexican ancestry, their ethnic consciousness is not identical. Some interviewees, who were raised in Mexico during their early childhood, clearly distinguished themselves from Chicano/Mexican American community activists because they cannot relate the Mexican American experience to their own.

However, the author found that all of the interviewees share the experience of being a minority or being marginalized sometime in their life. In most of the cases these experiences took place in relation to their Mexican background. Some of the experiences were positive, but in many cases they had a feeling of marginality and sometimes conflict with peers and school teachers.

The finding of this study suggests that this experience of marginalization is a powerful incentive for the youths to engage in community work. One incentive is a desire to pay back their community for the support and encouragement they received in the past. Most of them faced some challenges as Mexican children, but

they went through them with someone's support and understanding. The other motivation is a consciousness of "social agency," a desire to change social phenomena. When they experience or witness social injustice, they want to avoid a recurrence of the incident. The author speculates that they engage in community work with the desire, conscious or unconscious, that their involvement will contribute to reducing social injustice.

Past studies on Mexican American youth described their ambiguous identity as neither fully American nor Mexican. The historical examination of their experience showed that their identity was swayed in relation to the dominant society and its attitude toward the Mexican American population. The contemporary Mexican American youths interviewed in this study also recognized their ambivalent position and identity deriving from their bicultural experience. The author speculates that there is a linkage between their ambivalent position and a desire to become involved in their community. Through this involvement, they identify themselves with people in the community. By helping them with their challenges, they develop a bond and a sense of connectedness with people of the community. The involvement makes the youths acknowledge their role and responsibility to the community and that recognition leads them to define their identity. It is a process of their identity confirmation, or a way to make youth reflect on who they are in order to establish a definite self-recognition.

The findings in this study suggested that the consistent desire for

community involvement was found among some youths of Mexican origin over generations. Earlier generations of Mexican American youth demonstrated active commitment to improve the socioeconomic status of their community. During the early 20th century the purpose of their involvement was to establish recognition as U.S. citizens. The Chicano activists in the later generation sought a distinctive strategy from the former one, but they also centered on community involvement as their primary mission. For contemporary youth, the individual experiences and backgrounds are different. However, they have a political consciousness in common which is sensitive to the unbalanced resource distribution in society. Their ambivalent bicultural position enables them to understand the marginalized status of their community and the issues which encourage them to work in the community.

This study focused on current youths of Mexican origin and the findings demonstrated their consistent care for their community as well as the dynamics of their ethnic identity. It is necessary for us to know the contemporary minority youths' experiences and their desire to contribute to social improvement based on their experiences and background. This acknowledgement will make us more familiar with the situation of minority youth, not on a superficial level but a more deeper level of comprehension.

APPENDIX A

Questinnaires for Potential Interview Participants

1. Age _____

2. Gender _____

3. Ethnic background _____

4. Family Background

   a. Where were your parent(s) born?

   Father _____

   Mother _____

   b. Where were you born?

   _____

   c. Place you were raised.

   _____

5. Education

   Are you currently enrolled in any school/college/university?

   Yes ⇒ please answer ①

   No ⇒ please answer ②

   ① If YES, please mark the appropriate one below.

   _____ High school _____ Community college

_____ Four-year college/University _____ Graduate school

Other (Please specify) _____

Year of attendance _____

Level

_____ undergraduate _____ graduate

_____ doctorate

(If No) ② What is the highest level of education you completed and what is the degree?

_____ High school _____ Community college

_____ Four-year college/University _____ Graduate school

Other (Please specify) _____

Degree _____

C. Community involvement

a. Are you involved in any service work for Mexican/Latino community?

_____ YES _____ NO

If YES, which institution/ organization are you working with?

_____

Is it voluntary or are you paid?

_____ Voluntary _____ Paid

How often do you spend time for the work?

_____ Everyday _____ A couple of days in a week

_____ Weekly _____ Sometimes in a month

_____ Sometimes a year

What kind of community service/activity are you involved in?
(Please describe.)

_____

_____

_____

※ Are you willing to participate in the oral interview?

_____ YES _____ NO

★ If YES, please write down your contact information below. The following information will be given based on your voluntary will.

Name _____
Phone number _____
Address _____
Email address _____

Appendix B

Oral Interview Questions

A. About yourself

1. How do you describe yourself, Mexican American, Chicano/a, Latino/a, Hispanic, Mexican, or any other?

2. Do you socialize with people of your background most of the time? Or is it different according to the situation such as work, school or other social occasions?

B. About schooling and education

1. Did you father and/or mother have any college education?

2. Do/Did you attend public or private institution?

3. Please tell me your school experience especially after high school. Do you think the school environments were favorable or welcoming to you?

4. Have you ever taken classes of Mexican American/Chicano history? If so, how did they affect on you?

5. Did you have opportunities to learn about Chicano Movement? When and what kind of occasions did you have? What do you think the significance of the movement for Mexican American community?

C. About College Education

1. Did you have any specific incidents that motivated you to pursue a college education? If you do, please describe.

2. Why did you choose to the college or university you attended?

3. If you have a specific person who motivated or encouraged you to seek higher education, who is he or she?

4. Does your educational aspiration derive from your personal goals?

5. Do you think your ethnic background has affected on you in seeking the academic or educational achievement?

6. Have you ever felt any social barriers to hinder you from achieving success? If you have, is that feeling related to your aspiration for college education?

D. About community involvement

1. What was the incentive to get involved in (name of the organization)?

2. Do you think the experiences in the community have brought any changes/influence on you? If so, how about in terms of your identity?

3. How do you think your involvement in the community helps the community? advancement?

E. Sense of community orientation

1. When you are involved in (name of the organization), do you identify yourself with the people in the community?

2. Among the Mexican American community, do you find any divisions between newly-arrived immigrant people and long-term residents? If you do, can you tell me in what occasion or situation?

3. Do you feel the community you are involved in is suffering from disadvantages such as socioeconomic ones? If so, please tell me what they are.

4. Do you think the Mexican/Mexican American community needs to be politically empowered? If so, how do you think it can be done?

5. What role do you think education would have on the Mexican American community?

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